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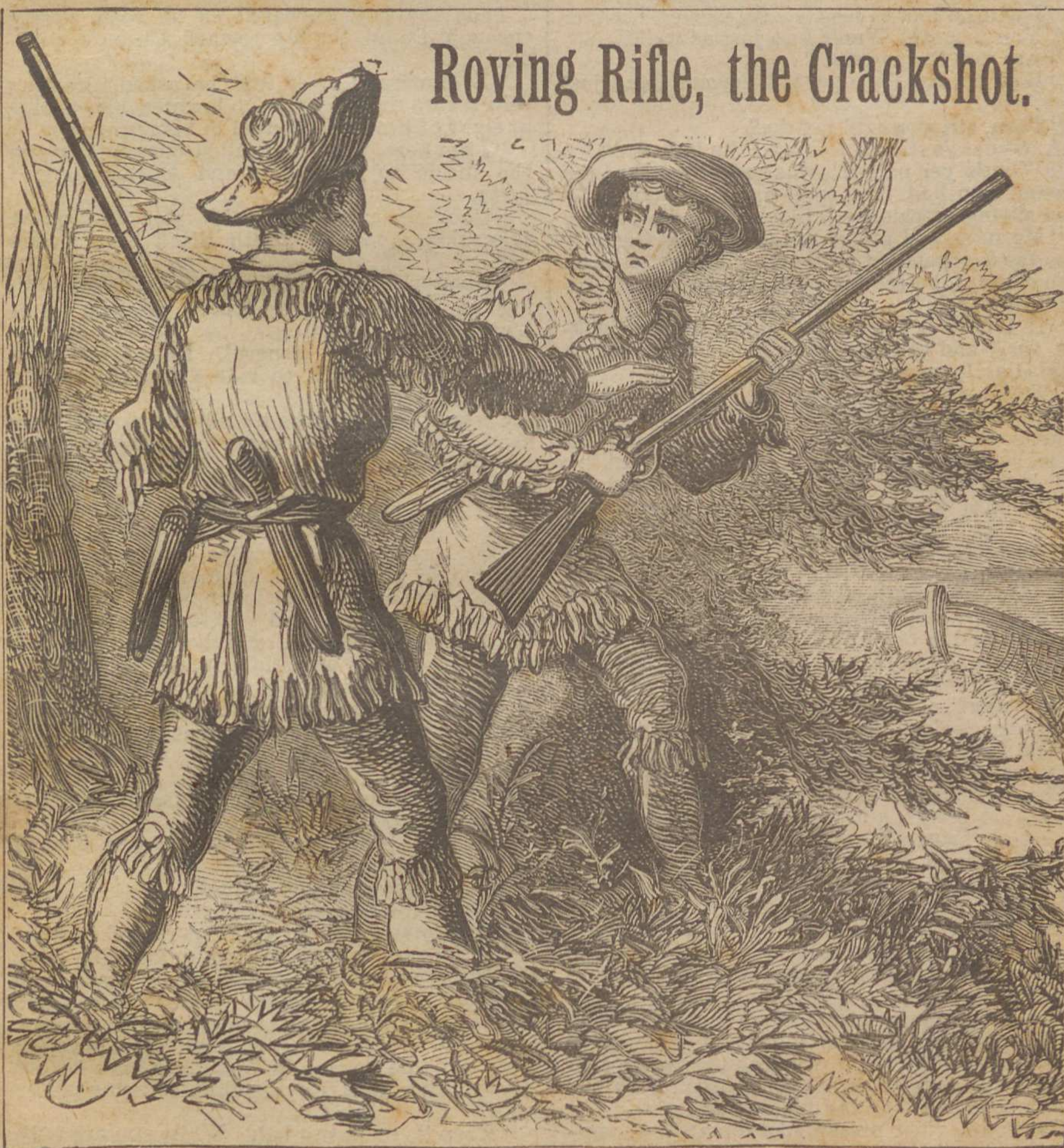
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Roving Rifle,

CUSTER'S LITTLE SCOUT;

OR,

From the Plains to West Point.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "THE SNOW TRAIL," "SNOW-SHOE TOM," "THE KIT CARSON CLUB," "FIGHTING FRED," "YOUNG TRAIL HUNTERS," "THE BOY DETECTIVES," "BOY EXILES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

RENEWING OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

"I WOULD like to see General Custer."

"You would? Won't I do just as well?"

"Are you the general?"

"Wal, no, but I'm a part of the command just now."

"Then, sir, you will not do."

A moment's silence followed the last word.

"What's yer name?" was suddenly asked the person who had first spoken, a boy about sixteen sitting astride a wild-looking Indian horse.

"My name? I prefer to tell General Custer," was the independent answer. "I'll just ride on in'o camp, for I see I'm on the right trail."

"Got any Injun news?"

"If I have it belongs to the soldier I'm looking for," and the boy spoke to his horse which immediately started forward.

"That's wild America for ye," said the bronze scout, looking after the youth whom he had just questioned. "I've been in this kentry time an' ag'in, but I never heard of him before. Wouldn't tell me his name, eh? Mighty independent, strikes me. If he shows off *that* way to the general he'll leave Camp Supply mighty soon after he gits thar. I've a notion to go back an' see the fun; but no, I'll let him go."

It was the month of November, and Custer's little army, consisting solely of the Seventh Cavalry and a few experienced scouts, was encamped on the north fork of Canadian River in the Indian Territory.

He was about to inaugurate his famous winter campaign against the hostiles, whom he expected to find in the Wichita country—a long march south of his present camp.

The expedition had marched to Camp Supply from Fort Dodge, and Custer was momentarily expecting General Sheridan, who would give him in person the final orders for which he waited.

He knew not where the red enemy was to be found, but he knew that he would be expected to find him, and not only to find him, but to inflict a punishment which the Indians would not soon forget.

The camp-loungers were much surprised when in the gray of the biting November morning they saw the boy ride toward the general's tent—the only sign of life about which was the sentry that paced to and fro in front of it.

The young rider presented a romantic appearance.

He wore a well-fitting suit of Indian-tanned

deer-skin. The coat, or jacket, was crowned with a cape which covered a pair of ample shoulders, and was fringed; there was fringe also along the outside seams of his leggings, and beads on the Pawnee moccasins that incased his feet.

His face, quite dark and the very picture of rugged health, was handsome. There was a good-natured twinkle in his deep-blue eyes, and he wore his hair long, like Custer himself at that day.

Scout-like, he carried a splendid repeating-rifle across the saddle in front, and a revolver sticking beside a hunting-knife in his buckskin belt told that the youth was prepared for almost any emergency.

He sat easily in a saddle which did not possess any stirrups, and his bridle had doubtless been made by his own hands.

Thus the boy appeared as he rode slowly through Camp Supply toward Custer's quarters.

"Is General Custer in?" he asked, drawing rein before the sentry, who lowered his carbine at sight of him, and paused in his rounds.

"I am here, my boy," called out some one on the inside of the tent, and Custer stepped forth.

"Good-morning, general," was the quick salutation, and the youth lifted his raccoon cap.

"Good-morning, sir," returned Custer, smiling as he saluted. "Where do you come from?"

"From the West, general. Heard you were here, and concluded to ride down to see if I could get a job."

Custer's keen eyes had studied the lad from head to foot, and his admiring gaze told that the inspection had resulted favorably for the applicant.

"A job?" the general echoed. "What do you want to do?"

"Oh, anything that you've got for me to do. I'd like to go with you against the hostiles. I want to see a little real Injun war. I've heard of you, gonoral, and I'd like to serve with you through one campaign. Maybe I can serve you as scout. I know something about the country toward the Wichita—"

"Good for that!" interrupted Custer. "I want men who know something of that region."

"But I'm not a man!"

Custer smiled.

"I'll make one out of you," he said. "What is your name?"

"Roving Rifle," replied the boy, a flash of pride in his eyes.

"But your American name?"

"That's it—Roving Rifle."

"You have another name?" persisted Custer.

"If I have, general, I'd like to know it. You see, I've been with the red-skins ever since I can recollect, excepting the few seasons I've roughed it with the white trappers along the Cimarron. Roving Rifle—that's me, general. If you've got a better name for me, why, let me have it; but I'm thinking that Roving Rifle suits me pretty well."

"Keep it, then, my lad. While you are with me nobody shall deprive you of it."

The boy's face beamed with joy.

"Then you'll give me a job?" he exclaimed.

"I'll enroll you among my scouts."

"Many thanks! It's the hight of my ambition to serve under General Custer. I don't want any pay, but fun and fighting—that's all."

"You'll get plenty of the latter if we find the hostiles," observed the general. "You came in from the West, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you meet a white man and two Indians?"

"I did, sir."

"Well, they belong to my command. The Indians were my Osage scouts; the white man was California Joe."

"I recognized Joe right away; but he didn't know me," said Roving Rifle. "He is as inquisitive as ever. He never told you about the Indian he talked to death once, did he?"

"No," laughed Custer. "You can put it at the old fellow when he comes in. By that means you can resume your acquaintance with him."

"I'll do it," declared the boy.

"Get down, then, and mess with me this morning. I want to know something about the Wichita country."

Already a friendship had sprung up between Custer and the youth; so, in response to the soldier's invitation, Roving Rifle dismounted and let his reins lie on the horse's neck.

"Black Pawnee is a horse that is a horse," he said proudly, as Custer bestowed a look of admiration upon the coal-black steed he had ridden into camp. "There's only one better in all this country, just now, general, and that is yours. My horse can talk, almost and all the gold west of the Missouri, and that's a great deal, couldn't buy him."

Custer by this time had led the way into his tent, which Roving Rifle had entered with his hat in his hand, a mark of politeness which did not escape the soldier's eye.

Then it was that Custer turned questioner again.

He wanted information about the country of the hostiles, and Roving Rifle's visit to camp could not have been more opportune.

To all of his questions the boy scout returned lucid answers, and the information which he furnished, as he went along, more than delighted Custer.

"Is the gin'ral in?" suddenly asked a coarse voice on the outside of the tent.

"That's California Joe now," announced Custer, glancing at Roving Rifle. "Let's go out and see him."

Custer stepped forward, followed by the youth, whose eyes beamed with merriment.

"Hello! hyer ye ar', gin'ral!" cried the bronze scout, catching sight of Custer. "An' thar's the young skipper, too."

California Joe was accompanied by the two Osage scouts, who were fine-looking specimens of the red race, and the best Indian scouts Custer had ever had.

"Yes, Joe, this is Roving Rifle," and Custer tipped the boy a wink as he glanced at him. "You may have met him before. At any rate, he seems to know you."

"Rovin' Rifle? Knows me? I guess not, gin'ral. Whar did you ever see me, boy?"

"Two winters ago on Wolf Creek," answered Roving Rifle, advancing toward the famous scout. "No, you don't remember me. I was an Indian then—one of Black Heel's band, and I helped to bury Red Hoof, the old brave you talked to death."

In an instant California Joe's countenance underwent a change. His parchment-like face suddenly grew dark, and lightning seemed to dart from his eyes.

"You mean little rascal, do you throw that up to me?" he exclaimed, making a grab at Roving Rifle. "I swore I'd jerk daylight out of the first man or boy what did it. That old Injun froze ter death while I war talkin' to him, thet's the truth of the matter, gin'ral. Ha! I've got you fast! Confound yer picter! I ought to softin the ground with you."

Nimble though he was, Roving Rifle had failed to get beyond the reach of the old scout's arm, and while California Joe spoke he lifted the boy clear of the ground.

Roving Rifle struggled to release himself, but his strength was not equal to the task. California Joe held him tight with an air of triumph.

"Talked an Injun to death, did I?" exclaimed the irate old gentleman. "Take it all back, Little Rifle, or I'll mop the ground with you."

The boy's eyes returned a defiant look.

"It's a lie got up to blast my reputation, gin'ral," continued the old rover of the plains, glancing at Custer, who was almost bursting with suppressed merriment. "Ef I could talk Injuns to death I'd hire out to Uncle Sam to conduct the war on my own hook. Look out, Roving Rifle! I'm goin' to introduce ye to mother earth!"

California Joe rose in his stirrups with the last word and the boy was lifted above his head.

In another moment Roving Rifle would have been flung to the ground with crushing force if Custer had not stepped forward.

"That will do, Joe. Put the boy down," he commanded, gently, yet with a certain firmness inseparable with the soldier. "Roving Rifle only wanted to renew an old acquaintance—that was all."

"All?" echoed California Joe reluctantly lowering the lad. "It's a thunderin' sight to me, gin'ral. I'll let him go for the present, but he mustn't throw that old slander up to me any more. Thet's one of the things Californy Joe won't stand."

Roving Rifle was placed upon his feet again without injury.

"Pardon me, California," he said, laying his hand on the old scout's buckskin leggings, and looking up into his face, still stormy. "I shall not offend any more. You and I ought to be friends."

"We can—we will be!" cried Joe, putting down one of his bronze hands. "Gin'ral ar' you goin' ter take the young pard with us?"

"Yes."

"Good! that suits me!" declared the scout, evidently pleased.

"And it suits me, too!" replied Roving Rifle as he squeezed Joe's hand again.

CHAPTER II.

BIG BISON, THE 'RAPAHOE.

A NARROW plain separated Custer's encampment from the tents of General Sheridan, and across it the dashing cavalryman took Roving Rifle after breakfast and introduced him to the lieutenant-general.

Sheridan received the boy with much cordiality, and questioned him about the Indian country toward the south.

Roving Rifle was glad that he could give the two generals information sorely needed just at that time. He had spent almost his entire life among the Indians, passing as a privileged character from tribe to tribe, now hunting with the Sioux, and now wintering with the Arapahoes. He knew the sign language of each tribe with which he had come in contact, and could pick out a trail among the mountains with the ease of an old red trailer.

"Keep that boy, general. He's worth his weight in gold," said Sheridan to Custer at the first opportunity.

Roving Rifle therefore was given the freedom of the camp. He came and went at his own pleasure, sometimes mounted on Black Pawnee, at other times on foot, with his rifle at a "trail," and his eyes ever on the alert.

Custer remained six days at Camp Supply.

The troops were eager to be off.

They had been brought into the Indian Territory to fight, and inactivity did not please them.

At last orders came for the advance, and nobody greeted them with more delight than Custer himself.

"Now I will see what is in this soldier," said Roving Rifle, to himself, when he was told that the regiment would break camp on the following day as soon as it was light enough to move. "I may have got myself into a snap by deserting my foster-father, but he has evidently forgotten me. I will run the risk, anyhow."

Soon after hearing the welcome news the boy scout crept through the picket lines on the west, and halted in a little valley almost a mile from camp.

The night was cold and crisp, as if there was snow in the air, and the wind that whistled through the valley almost froze the youth's face.

Why had he left Custer's camp?

In the middle of the valley stood a small clump of trees, which from a short distance resembled a group of men, and toward it the boy made his way.

When he reached it he stooped and put his ear to the ground, which at that spot was almost devoid of grass.

For some moments he listened intently, but without any apparent satisfaction.

All at once, however, he started and sprang erect.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "One Belt keeps his promise."

Then he distinctly heard a horse approaching with the wind, and his eyes kindled with joy.

Nearer and nearer came the horse, and at length a splendid animal halted before the boy.

The horse had a rider.

In an instant the boy scout's hand was clasped

in the one put down to him by the person in the Indian saddle.

"One Belt is here, brother," said a voice, in the Arapahoe tongue.

"One Belt never breaks his promise," was Roving Rifle's response. "It is true we are brothers."

The person whom the white boy addressed was a young Indian of his own build and age.

He already wore the scalp-lock of his tribe, and his weapons were the bow and arrows.

"The great white soldier moves forward on the trail," resumed Roving Rifle.

"When?"

"When the morning comes."

The Indian boy straightened on his blanket.

"You will tell Noreta that the blue-coats come. You will speak to no one else."

"One Belt understands. He will find Noreta's ear."

"And no one else's?"

"One Belt remembers his oath. He remembers how the red wolves treated him and his brother Roving Rifle. He will not lift his hand to save them. He will find Noreta and whisper to her that the blue-coated warriors are on the trail."

"Then go! It will snow before morning and the white flakes will hide One Belt's trail. I am the great general's scout. I have told him that I will help him find Black Kettle and his braves. One Belt, I will keep my word. Go!—to Noreta."

The Indian boy wheeled his horse.

The reins were already in his hands.

"To Noreta!" he exclaimed, and the next second the horse bounded off like an arrow released by a Pawnee hunter's hand.

"May Heaven save Noreta," murmured Roving Rifle fervently, while he listened to the hoof-beats rapidly diminishing in sound. "I can trust One Belt, for we have been brothers these many years. I send him over General Custer's trail with a warning for Noreta, but I do not betray the general's secret. I would be false to myself if I did not try to save Noreta from the impending doom."

He stood a while longer by the clump of trees, and then turned away as the sound of One Belt's flight ceased to be audible.

He was in the act of retracing his steps, when a figure moved in the grass a few feet away and an Indian brave crept toward him.

Roving Rifle did not see the snake-like eyes that regarded him with flashes of rage and triumph.

The Indian rose to a crouching posture, and laid aside the bow he had until that moment carried in his hand.

Custer's little scout took a step toward camp. Suddenly the Indian spy darted at him, and before Roving Rifle was aware of his presence, four red fingers encircled his arm.

Without an alarming cry, but with almost throbless heart, Roving Rifle wheeled in his tracks and stood face to face with a stalwart redskin, whose eyes seemed on fire.

"Unhand me!" he commanded, jerking back, but of course he was not obeyed; he might as well have spoken to Sitting Bull himself.

"Roving Rifle serving the Yellow-haired

Chief, eh?" hissed the Indian. "He did not know that Big Bison was near—Big Bison, the 'Rapahoe!"

"Of course I was not on the alert for you," answered the boy, undaunted now by the look of the red-skin warrior. "I will be frank to say that if I had known you were near, you would not have heard a word."

"Roving Rifle would have killed the Bison?"

"I would have taken care that you do not bother Custer on his Indian-hunt."

"Does Roving Rifle go with Yellow Hair?"

"He does."

"But he sends One Belt to save Noreta. Why does he do this?"

"You are the last Indian who should ask that question. You know why."

A malicious grin distorted the Arapahoe's features.

"But Noreta is an Arapahoe, while Yellow Hair marches against the Cheyennes and the Kivivoes."

"Never mind. One Belt will find Noreta."

"If Big Bison does not find One Belt first."

The meaning of the Indian's last sentence seemed to pierce Roving Rifle like a knife.

"You find One Belt?" he cried. "You shall never do that."

Summoning all his strength to his aid, he jerked violently as he spoke the last sentence, and tore himself from Big Bison's grasp.

The escape carried him tottering back out of the red-skin's reach, but with a hoarse cry the Bison leaped madly after him.

Quick as a flash and before he had fully recovered his equilibrium, Roving Rifle whipped out his knife, and when Big Bison threw out his hand to reseize his prey, he was confronted by a blade that glittered in the boy's uplifted hand.

"Back! or I'll kill you!" cried Custer's little scout, standing firmly braced on the ground.

"Big Bison no afraid of a boy's knife!" was the red-skin's challenge, as without hesitation he threw himself upon the youth.

"Take the consequences, then!" and down came the knife despite the Indian's uplifted arm, but in spite of the blow the Indian's hand fell like a trip-hammer upon the boy-scout's shoulder, sending him back a step and almost to the earth.

When he recovered again he saw his enemy lying in the grass silent and motionless, with one broad hand half covering a horrid gash in his breast.

"That's what an Indian gets for fooling with me!" muttered Roving Rifle. "More than one insult has that scarlet fiend forced me to pocket while I was with his tribe. I have longed for my day to come, but I don't like to shed blood—not even an Indian's. However, while I have paid Big Bison for the past I have helped Custer. That Indian was a spy. He has been watching Custer's movements, and if he had lived he would have warned Black Kettle and his villages of our advance."

Roving Rifle did not bend over the Arapahoe spy to see whether life was extinct, but turned from the scene of his adventure and went back to camp.

He passed by numerous fires, where many soldiers with benumbed fingers were writing

letters home, and did not pause until he found three men lying under the boughs of a tree in the dying light of a cottonwood limb.

The faces of two of the men were hidden by blankets, but their garments betrayed their identity.

They were Custer's Osage scouts.

The third man moved slightly as Roving Rifle came up, and then rose to his feet.

"Whar have you been and, what's thet on yer hand?"

The little scout started at the question and his eyes fell quickly to his hand.

"Look hyer, Rifle," exclaimed California Joe before the boy could stammer a reply. "We ar' pards, you know, sarvin' Custer on this Injun-hunt. Tell me ther plain facts. You've been out of camp, an' you've tackled some one."

The old trailer's look was enough to force the truth from the boy's tongue.

"I met an Indian—a spy—but I killed him!" he responded.

"Whar is he?"

"Down in the valley by the bunch of trees. His blood is on my hand."

"What tribe?"

"The 'Rapahoes."

California Joe started off like an arrow from a bow and Roving Rifle kept at his heels.

Not a word was spoken until the big scout halted beside the tree-group in the middle of the starlit valley.

"Whar's yer Injun?" queried California Joe, looking around.

Roving Rifle sprung to the spot where he had seen the Indian fall, but Big Bison was not there!

He stood still, with a cold sensation creeping across his cheeks, and a chill at his heart.

California Joe threw himself on the ground at the boy's feet.

"He was hyer, thet's a fact," averred Joe, looking up into Roving Rifle's face. "Thar's moisture on the grass which is blood. Hyer goes the trail," and the old Indian fighter began to crawl through the grass like a snake.

Twenty yards away he halted, and then got up.

"If thet Injun lives, Custer's hunt won't amount to shucks," he decided.

"I know that," asserted Roving Rifle. "Look here, Joe; you go back, and keep with the general. I will see that Big Bison does not warn the prey."

"You, boy? It is a big contract."

"I know it, but I will make Custer's victory certain. The Bison must be found!"

CHAPTER III.

THE HUNT FOR BIG BISON.

ROVING RIFLE'S determination surprised California Joe, and his look became a stare in the silence that followed the boy's last word.

"Whar's yer horse?" he asked at length.

"I will get him. Black Pawnee knows how to trail an Indian nearly as well as his master," answered the young scout, with a smile. "Yes, Joe; go back to Custer, and let me have my own way in this affair."

"Just as you say, Rifle; but hang me, ef I

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like to see a boy with your grit start off on an uncertain trip like this. The Bison may get clear to Black Kettle's lodges."

"I am sure he will not do that. He is badly wounded—"

"But able to hang on to his horse."

"He had a horse here, then?"

"Of course he had. I discovered hoof-tracks over thar. Thet Injun is well mounted. What do you say now, Rifle?"

"I haven't changed my mind; I shall hunt him."

"I hope you'll find him; ef you do, you'll jine us soon?"

"Before long. I will be with Custer before he strikes the enemy."

"Good-by, then!"

"Good-by, Joe."

The big scout turned away and left the little one standing on the spot where the Arapahoe spy had fallen before his knife.

Roving Rifle did not move until California Joe had vanished.

Then he turned and resought the camp by a route totally different from that taken by the other.

He directed his steps toward the corral which contained nearly all the horses belonging to the command. It was well guarded, and the cold air forced the sentries to pace their beats to keep warm, and consequently rendered them watchful.

Roving Rifle did not try to gain the corral, but allowed a guard to halt him, when he made himself known, and gave the proper countersign, which, by Custer's orders, had been given to him before dark.

"You can't find your horse without a light," said the guard.

"Can't, eh?" and a smile overspread the little scout's face. "We will see."

Roving Rifle leaned over the strong rope which at that place formed one of the bounds of the corral, and sent forth a peculiar whistle, which was quickly responded to by a shrill whinny from the center of the pen.

The next instant there was a commotion among the horses, and an animal blacker than the night speedily thrust his head over the rope and licked the boy's hand.

The soldier uttered an exclamation of astonishment, which heightened the look of pride kindled in Roving Rifle's eyes.

Black Pawnee was soon liberated from the corral, and followed his young master from the spot.

Not far away Roving Rifle took from among the thick foliage of a tree his simple horse equipments, and adjusted them with a minute's labor.

"Now for an Indian-chase—now for Custer, Pawnee!" he exclaimed as he seated himself firmly on the black steed's back. "It may be a long ride, but you must not weaken—you must not fail me. Away we go!"

He did not touch Black Pawnee with a spur as he finished, for the horse needed no such incentive, and the wondering guard was left alone to resume his tramp under the cold autumn stars.

A short time sufficed to carry Roving Rifle back to the tree group in the little valley.

California Joe had assured him that Big Bison, though desperately wounded as no doubt he was, had effected his escape, moving in a westerly direction, but he had to see for himself.

The stars still afforded light enough to show him the trail of a horse leading through the grass.

Black Pawnee followed close behind his master while the trail was examined, and when the boy rose from the ground half a mile from the valley, the horse presented himself ready for mounting again, as if he knew that the hunt for the Arapahoe was about to begin in earnest.

It was now almost rayless darkness.

During Roving Rifle's trailing across the little valley the wind had freshened until it blew quite hard, and unseen objects, fleecy and cold, occasionally touched his face.

"The snow is here!" he said to his horse. "Custer will have to begin his Indian campaign in a land of white."

Storm was not to turn the boy scout back.

He recognized the importance of overhauling Big Bison.

It was in the Indian's power to bring Custer's plans all to naught, if not to overwhelm the devoted little army with defeat and massacre.

Custer's plan was to steal a march on the hostiles in their own villages on the edge of winter.

Spring and summer campaigns had failed, and the two generals—Sheridan and Custer—had resolved to try a new policy.

It was a long ways to the red villages on the bank of the Wichita, near the Antelope Hills, in the Indian Territory.

Big Bison had a long ride before him if he expected to gain the towns and warn the Indians of Custer's approach, and Roving Rifle, if he hoped to overtake the wounded spy, had an equally long ride full of peril and privation before him.

But nothing daunted he set out cheerfully.

He seemed to know where he would strike the Indian's trail at daylight, for as he galloped away he did not pay any attention to the trampled grass of the region he was traversing.

Midnight had given place to the earliest hours of another day, and Roving Rifle kept on without a glance behind him.

If the reader could have surveyed a certain stretch of country in the first flushes of the next dawn we are sure that an exclamation of surprise would have escaped him.

One night had wrought a startling change.

The land which at the last sunset rejoiced in the autumn colors, green and brown, was now white.

The earth was covered with a soft coating of snow a foot in depth, a cheerless prospect for the soldiers who were to break camp that day and start out on their first campaign in many months.

If it was a cheerless prospect for them what was it for Roving Rifle, whom the morning found moving across a plain through the snow with his face turned toward the south?

Men would have turned back, but the boy kept on with resolution in his deep-blue eyes.

"Snow or storm must not turn me back. I am Custer's soldier now. The success of the winter march depends on finding the 'Rapahoe spy.'"

More than once such words as these escaped his lips as he pressed on across the whitened plain, whose only trail was the one he was making.

It was a dreary landscape unrelieved by anything.

Roving Rifle's thoughts went back to the soldiers he had left behind.

He could imagine them toiling through the snow with California Joe and the Osage scouts in advance of the column, and he wondered more than once what Custer would say when he should discover his absence.

The sun came up, but it did not dissipate the cold of that November morning.

A cutting wind blew against the boy's right cheek, chilling the blood that circulated through it, and kept frozen the snow in his black steed's mane.

The plain on which the morning found him was crossed at last, and he entered a hilly country that looked dangerous.

Still no trail rewarded him.

What had become of Big Bison?

It is true that the Arapahoe had had a good start; but would not weakness and the condition of his wound force him to halt before long?

The snow had completely whitened the Indian's trail.

Why, then, had Roving Rifle guided his horse to the hills?

We need but say that the little scout was familiar with the country he was traveling.

He knew every mile between Custer's last camp and the Indian villages on the Wichita.

His boyhood had been passed on the vast hunting-grounds of the Southwest; he knew the homes of the Indians as well as the haunts of the buffalo, the trail of the war-party as well as the track of the red-skinned hunter.

He knew that Big Bison would take a route not likely to be taken by Custer's army, a track which would lead him to the Wichita villages in a shorter time than he could reach them by any other way.

It was from these reasons that Roving Rifle pushed on through the snow, and entered the hilly country before him.

It lay on Big Bison's shortest route, and it was at the same time the haunt of the Southwest grizzly.

There were loose rocks under the snow in the hills that forced Roving Rifle to check his speed.

Some of the cones were quite lofty and were covered with snow to their summits, the little bushes bending beneath their load of white, and the trails everywhere entirely obliterated.

Deeper into the new district pushed Big Bison's boy hunter.

The look of resolution seen in his eyes at the outset of the hunt had not abated one jot.

Suddenly Black Pawnee threw up his head, and began to snuff the air suspiciously.

"What do you smell, Pawnee?" asked the boy scout.

The horse turned his head, and gave his little master an almost human look.

"Don't you smell it, too?" Black Pawnee's eyes seemed to say.

All at once the boy's eyes kindled.

"Smoke! I smell a fire!" he exclaimed. "I am near a camp of some kind."

He took the buckskin covering from the lock of his repeating-rifle as he finished speaking, and moved on.

He was sure now that he smelled a fire that was not a great distance away.

It might be Big Bison's lone camp, or the camp-fire of a band of hostiles.

He was in a dangerous country, one through which Custer would not pass without a close inspection beforehand.

Half a mile further on he rounded the more covered base of a hill and suddenly drew rein.

"You were not mistaken, Pawnee," he spoke to his horse. "We've found the lair of a beast of some kind."

Roving Rifle was looking while he spoke at a thin column of bluish smoke rising from the side of another hill straight ahead.

It curled gracefully above the bushes, telling him that somewhere beneath the snow was a fire of mountain fagots.

The trail led to the spot; the party around the fire appeared snow-bound.

Roving Rifle rode close to the place where the smoke rose above the ground, then dismounted and crept still closer.

He found what he had expected to find, a small hole in the side of the hill.

Not the sign of a trail led into it, for snow which had lain undisturbed since its fall almost blocked the aperture up, leaving a hole scarcely large enough to admit the nose of a grizzly.

A strange smile overspread Roving Rifle's face as he drew back after a brief inspection of the place.

He felt certain that he had discovered the Arapahoe's retreat, but how to get at him, that was the question.

Still the smoke curled above the hill, now and then changing color and telling the perplexed little scout that a man was certainly watching the fire in the cavern.

"I'm not here for the purpose of mincing matters!" exclaimed the boy all at once. "I am here to see who is at that fire. If it be Big Bison, then I am here to do Custer a service."

With the last word he crept up the hillside again and stopped at the hole in the ground.

Putting his ear there he listened, but for a moment not a sound of any kind was borne to his ears.

Then he heard the breathing of a person asleep.

Could it be Big Bison?

"I'm going in to see," he said in reply to the above question, which he had asked himself mentally.

CHAPTER IV.

BETWEEN HANDS AND TEETH.

THE aperture at which Roving Rifle had listened, was the entrance to, not the chimney of, the chamber in the hillside.

As we have said, it was hardly large enough to admit the nose of a grizzly, the snow having blocked it almost shut; but the boy scout re-

moved it with his hands until the place readily admitted his body.

With a parting glance at his horse which had moved a slight distance up the hill, and stood watching him like a faithful servant, Roving Rifle disappeared in the cavern.

He found himself surrounded by almost complete darkness, through which came the regular breathing he had already heard.

Having left his rifle behind as it might prove unwieldy in the hillside cavern, and armed with knife and revolver, one in either hand, the scout advanced along the corridor into which he had crept.

He did not know how much space intervened between him and the main chamber, for the cave was new to him.

Several times he sent a look backward to see the cold blue sky far beyond the rounded entrance to the cave.

"What does that mean?" fell suddenly from his lips when during one of these glances he failed to see the sky.

It was, indeed, strange.

A moment before he had noticed the sky, now it was not to be seen at all!

Roving Rifle stopped and turned to retrace his steps.

Could it be that he was being followed?

To turn was to begin to move toward the opening again.

A foe in his rear at that moment would prove the most dangerous thing that could be imagined. It must be attended to at first.

He had not proceeded a yard on the back trail ere he stopped.

He was in a dilemma.

The mouth of the cavern was still darkened, and there was a noise in the chamber toward which he had lately crept.

The reader can imagine Roving Rifle's thoughts.

Suddenly a whinny saluted his ears, and the blue sky was seen again.

"Ah! it was Black Pawnee's head!" ejaculated the boy. "But his whinny means something. There is danger on the outside. That horse can almost talk."

He did not hesitate any longer, but sprung back to the mouth of the cavern.

Sure enough! There was Pawnee's head close to the opening. The black steed's eyes were full of excitement, and at his master's appearance, he threw a hasty and meaning look down the hillside.

"What is it, old fellow?" asked Roving Rifle, beginning to creep from the cavern. "This isn't the first time you've warned me of danger."

Eager to see what had attracted the horse's attention, for he knew that some danger threatened him, the boy scout hastened to leave the cave.

He did not see the figure that crept down the corridor in his rear, with panther tread and glittering eyes, yet he might have known that Pawnee's whining would arouse the occupant of the chamber.

This is exactly what had taken place.

The object approaching Custer's little scout from behind was an Indian; he came down the corridor almost on all fours without noise, and

eager, as his snapping eyes indicated, to seize his prey.

Roving Rifle had nearly drawn his body from the hillside cavern when he felt his legs grasped by human hands, and he was jerked back without ceremony.

A thrill shot through the boy's frame and an exclamation of horror was forced from his lips.

"Great God! am I to fall by Big Bison's hand in this manner?" he cried.

He made a desperate effort to keep himself from being pulled back into the corridor by the foe in his rear.

He seized hold of some bushes that grew near the mouth of the cave, and forced by the action to relinquish his weapons, he hung on for dear life.

Roving Rifle's situation was somewhat ludicrous, if it was attended by the utmost danger.

He soon found that the frozen bushes did not possess a strength equal to that owned by the vindictive enemy behind.

All at once they gave way, coming up by their roots, and Roving Rifle gave himself up for lost.

The next instant, however, Black Pawnee's head darted forward, and he felt the brave steed's teeth sink into the stout buckskin that composed the cape on his shoulders.

Black Pawnee was going to pit his strength against the Indian's.

"Pull, Pawnee! The goods is stout and your teeth are steel. Pull me loose, good fellow."

Roving Rifle's words were not needed to urge the black horse to his duty.

To help him, he began to use his legs vigorously, hoping to kick his adversary loose; but the Indian's arms grew tighter about them, and Black Pawnee found a good match in his antagonist.

The horse braced his forefeet against the hillside and pulled vigorously; the Indian resisted with all his strength.

"Something's got to yield—Big Bison or the buckskin!" thought Roving Rifle, when, all of a sudden—snap! snap! went the well-sewed garments, and the next instant the stout cape was jerked over the little scout's head and Black Pawnee with the fragments between his teeth went rolling toward the bottom of the hill.

In a flash, as it were, Roving Rifle fell back into the cave, and into the arms of an Indian as well.

"You and me for it again, Bison," he exclaimed, believing, as was natural, that he had fallen into the clutches of the Arapahoe spy.

Several grunts of satisfaction replied to his words, and he was seized around the body before he could use the knife which he had regained during his steed's assistance, and dragged back toward the cavern proper.

Two minutes later Roving Rifle saw the remains of a fire, and then turned to look into the face of his captor.

"What Rifle try to git away so hard for?" demanded his captor as he looked. "Him 'fraid of his old friend, eh?"

A singular stare came into the young hunter's eyes.

"What! Is it you, my father?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, my son," was the quick response. "Where has the Rifle been so long? He has kept away from his father, Lean Bear. Where have you been so long?"

Roving Rifle was gazing into the speaker's face. He was a gaunt Indian with long arms and mad-looking eyes. A string of bear-teeth made up the strange necklace that hung on his naked breast; in the daylight he would have looked like a red lunatic; in the fitful light of the cavern fire he resembled some mountain demon.

Roving Rifle knew him at once. He was his red foster-father—a chief of the Kiowas, from whom he had received nothing but blows during his forced sojourn with the nation.

At last he fled from the ill-treatment, knowing that Lean Bear would hunt him ever afterward.

They had met again, and instead of encountering Big Bison, the Arapahoe, he had fallen into the clutches of the last savage he wanted to meet.

"Why don't Rifle speak?" continued the lean chief as he held the little scout at arm's length and viewed him with eyes that fairly blazed with triumph. "Has he lost his tongue? Where are the blue-coated soldiers? Are they goin' to hunt the Indian this winter?"

Roving Rifle involuntarily started.

Lean Bear's words had recalled his mission to his mind.

While he was being held by those long red fingers, Big Bison was pushing on to tell the villages that Custer was marching against them; he was paving the way for the little army's doom.

"I must not forget my mission for a moment," he said to himself. "I will outwit you, Lean Bear. Fate has placed me in your power again; but fortune will get me out of it."

Then he said aloud to the Indian:

"I have been looking for my red father, and I am glad that I have found him. Is the old wigwam near?"

Lean Bear was not to be duped; his grip did not relax.

CHAPTER V.

THE LITTLE SCOUT'S STRATAGEM.

ROVING RIFLE believed that an unluckier event than the finding of his red foster-father could not have taken place.

It had occurred at a time when he was on the most important trail of his life, when the safety of seven hundred soldiers depended on his success.

He had been in unpleasant situations before, but the present one was the most unpleasant of all.

As we have said, Lean Bear was not to be deceived by the little scout's well-feigned expressions of delight at having found him.

His quick perception told him that Roving Rifle was trying to hoodwink him for a purpose; but he did not let the boy know his feelings.

"Lean Bear glad to see the Rifle," he said. "Boy been gone long time. Him stay with his father now."

"Yes, I'll stay with you," was the answer, but Roving Rifle added under his breath: "Not a minute longer than I have to, you old sinner."

The Indian's eyes danced with savage glee whenever they regarded the boy, which was almost all the time.

At last he relaxed his grip and made Roving Rifle take a seat at the fire.

"Now, Rifle, tell me where all you have been!" he said in the voice of command the boy had often heard before.

He proceeded and narrated a number of his hunting adventures since leaving the Kiowas, and finally brought his history down to the date of our story.

To all Lean Bear listened in silence, his eyes fixed on the ground, after the manner of his people, but when Roving Rifle finished he suddenly elevated his dark orbs, and fastened them upon him.

"Where Yellow Hair at?" was the pointed question.

Roving Rifle could hardly repress a start.

"My trails did not cross Yellow Hair's track," he quickly said.

"No lies, Rifle."

"Why should I lie? Am I not a Kiowa?"

"A white one."

"True, but have I not fought and hunted with our people, father?"

"That is true."

"Then, how should I know where the chief of the blue-coats is?"

Lean Bear was silent for a moment, then he sprang up as if a sound had startled him, and walked toward the mouth of the cave rifle in hand.

He had not covered more than half the distance ere he stopped, and with a satisfactory grunt came back and reseated himself at the fire.

Roving Rifle knew that visitors were near, and he was wondering who they were when he heard footsteps behind him.

Instantly he turned to greet four athletic Kiowa warriors who did not seem the least surprised to see him.

"Ah! these are the fellows Black Pawnee saw while he stood guard at the mouth of the cave!" passed through the boy scout's mind. "I know them all; they used to be brother hunters of mine when I was a Kiowa. I wonder if they captured my horse?"

The four warriors looked quickly from Roving Rifle to Lean Bear.

"He has worked out Yellow Hair's trail, has he?" asked one.

"He says he does not know where it leads."

"He came from the northeast. He has slept in Yellow Hair's big camp."

Lean Bear turned upon the boy.

"Does the Rifle hear Creeping Snake?" he said. "My son, you have showed your father a forked tongue. Where is the white chief?"

"What I have said I will not add to," replied Roving Rifle in the Kiowa language, and his lips shut resolutely behind the last word.

The warriors exchanged looks with Lean Bear and surrounded the boy.

"Roving Rifle must tell his adopted people where Yellow Hair is," said one in tones that boded the little scout no good. "Tell us!"

Already the hands of the Kiowas rested on the handles of their tomahawks, and Roving Rifle saw that he was menaced with speedy death.

He knew the men who confronted him, the name and the character of each.

The Indians, then, had a suspicion that Custer would inaugurate a winter campaign.

They had heard of him whom they called Yellow Hair; they knew Custer's bravery, and it was natural that they should fear the gallant young general.

Roving Rifle did not quaver when he found himself in the midst of the braves.

A sign of fear and his doom would be sealed at once.

Therefore, he met the threatening looks of the braves with one of undaunted courage which was his only hope.

"Why does Roving Rifle hold his tongue?" cried the Creeping Snake. "He has slept in Yellow Hair's camp, and he will not tell his people."

"Why should I keep it from you?" suddenly cried the boy. "If Lean Bear will give me his knife, I will show him where the Great Father's soldiers are."

The old Kiowa did not hesitate, but he handed Roving Rifle his knife.

The floor of the cave was composed of soft stone on whose surface the point of a knife would make a deep impression.

Roving Rifle sat down and cleared a space with his hands.

Narrowly the Indians watched him.

He began to work out on the stones the crooked course of a river, then he crossed it with several trails, and finished by drawing the environs of a frontier post.

"Is Yellow Hair there?" asked Creeping Snake exhibiting some surprise.

Roving Rifle answered with a slight nod of assent.

The Indians exchanged quick glances.

They knew that the boy had drawn Fort Hays and its surroundings, but they could scarcely credit the assertion that General Custer was still in the interior of Kansas with his army.

"When did Roving Rifle leave Yellow Hair?" they asked.

"When the moon was born."

At that moment there came to the little scout's ears the whinny of a horse.

Black Pawnee had returned to the mouth of the cave.

The sound sent a thrill to Roving Rifle's heart, and he rose in a careless manner.

"Will the Rifle swear by the Great Spirit that his tongue was not forked when he spoke of the big white chief and his soldiers?" said one of the braves. "The winds have told the Kiowas that Yellow Hair is on the march."

"The wind may lie!" cried the little scout.

"The wind is the red-man's friend. It brings him the scent of the buffalo and the heavy tread of the grizzly," said Lean Wolf who seriously doubted the correctness of Roving Rifle's diagram of Custer's camp.

"Trust the wind, then. I will not stay."

With the last sentence the boy leaped between two of the Kiowa braves, and darted toward the mouth of the cave.

He knew that his information was discredited, and having spent his wild young life among the Indians of the Southwest border he knew, too, how a falsifier was punished.

His attempt to keep Custer's true whereabouts from the enemy had failed; he saw this by the Indians' looks.

His case was desperate; he had to escape then and there, or never hope to overtake Big Bison, the Arapahoe.

Hence his dash for liberty.

His first bound carried him ten feet toward the opening.

A wild cry rose behind him; it seemed to urge him on.

He sped like a rocket down the narrow corridor, at the end of which he expected to find his faithful horse.

A tomahawk whizzed past his head in the darkness, a hunting-knife thrown by one of the Indians struck the wall at his right and glanced, still he kept on.

It was life or death for Custer's little scout.

He reached the end of the corridor with an exclamation of triumph, and hailed with joy a glimpse of a horse's head.

It was Black Pawnee!

Without a second's halt Roving Rifle sprang from the cave and snatched up the revolver he had dropped among some bushes that grew near the opening.

A hand grasped his foot as he left the place, but a vigorous kick shook it loose.

A single bound carried him to the black horse which had greeted him with a joyful whinny.

Another moment and he was on Pawnee's back.

"Catch me if you can!" he shouted at the faces that appeared at the opening. "If you think I have lied about Yellow Hair find out the truth for yourselves!" And without waiting for a reply, which was a wild whoop of anger, Roving Rifle spoke to the horse which went off like a bullet.

Five discomfited Kiowas reached the ground in front of the cave too late to recapture Lean Bear's late prize.

The boy's dash for liberty had carried him through, and already he was riding over the snow toward the Southwest, ready to find Big Bison's trail, and save Custer from ambush and defeat.

The rage of the Kiowas, which showed itself in looks, cannot be described.

The last sound that the wind bore to their ears was Roving Rifle's defiant laugh, and while it still rung in their ears the base of the hill hid the boy from view.

Black Pawnee seemed to share in Roving Rifle's triumph, for with arched neck and blazing eyes, he carried him along at a gait that promised to bear him to the Gulf in a short time.

No wonder the boy loved his fine black steed.

Far from the scene of his adventures, Roving Rifle let the horse change his rapid gait into one less rapid, and turned him into a narrow pass which led to the right.

Suddenly he drew rein, and leaned toward the snow.

What did he see?

A trail was leading toward that point of the compass at which he was then moving; it had struck the pass from a gulch on his left.

Need we say, reader, that Roving Rifle's heart seemed to stand still for a moment?

With his eyes on the watch, he leaned further down, and suddenly picked up a handful of snow.

On the white surface which he had not disturbed in picking up the inch square, was a small, dark-red stain.

Roving Rifle's eyes kindled as he looked at it.

"I've struck the trail at last!" he cried.

CHAPTER VI.

FINDING BIG BISON.

YES, Roving Rifle had struck Big Bison's trail at last!

The red spot on the snow, which was a gout of human blood, told him this; and dashing the melting snow to earth, he gave Black Pawnee the word, and went down the hill pass at the top of equine speed.

No longer he thought of the mad Indians he had left behind; his thoughts were fixed on the one he knew was before.

Everything seemed to depend on his overtaking the wounded warrior spy, Big Bison, one of the most daring of the Arapahoe braves.

Roving Rifle was not surprised at the red-skin's endurance; he had known Indians to travel a long ways after being desperately wounded; and when he thought of the valuable information the Bison had gathered, he knew that he had resolved to reach the allied tribes on the banks of the Wichita, or die in the attempt.

The trail was very plain, although there were now no more gouts of gore on the snow.

It led in the direction Big Bison would be likely to take, or down the trail leading toward Black Kettle's villages.

Black Kettle was the principal chief against whom Custer was advancing—a vindictive red-skin, who had given the Government more trouble than all the other chiefs combined.

Black Kettle and Big Bison were warm friends. Roving Rifle knew this, for he had seen them on the war-path together.

As the sun, possessed of very little warmth, as it seemed, for it did not melt the snow, mounted the eastern heavens, the trail seemed endless, but the boy scout kept on.

"Nothing stops me now," he said. "I shall not turn back until I have found the Bison!"

The sun went down behind a bank of cold-gray clouds, and night followed.

Roving Rifle was still on the snow-trail which led on toward where he knew the red-skin villages were.

They were miles and miles away, but Big Bison must sustain life until he could reach them if he wanted to save their inhabitants from the vengeance of the blue-coats.

With night came to the ears of Custer's boy scout the lone long howl of the gaunt gray wolves that infested the Southwest trails.

Black Pawnee pricked up his ears for it was a sound he had heard before, and Roving Rifle patted affectionately his sleek neck as he said:

"A few mountain dogs don't scare us, old boy! You belong to Custer just as much as I do. Where Big Bison is there lies our goal, and not one foot this side of him!"

More than once after the sun went down the boy leaned forward and looked down the trail that ran on ahead.

He was yet on the right track.

Not until Black Pawnee threw his fox-like ears forward and showed a disposition to stop did the little scout draw rein.

The steed's ears were better than his; after dark he seemed to possess the eyes of an owl.

For several minutes boy and horse remained in the trail motionless as statues.

Not a sound was heard.

They occupied a narrow pass between two wooded hills, but the keen air astir did not shake the heavy coating of snow from the trees, nor move their boughs.

Still Roving Rifle knew that Pawnee had either smelt or heard something.

When at last he spoke gently to the horse, he was carried cautiously forward as if the animal knew that danger might be lurking among the shadows ahead.

All at once the horse stopped and refused to move.

Roving Rifle leaned forward and saw the trail to all appearances had ended at the edge of a precipice.

The stars and the big round moon peeping over a hill on his right showed him all this.

He slipped from his Indian saddle and glided forward, rifle in hand.

When he stopped he was on the very brink of a cliff beneath which he saw the dim outlines of a little valley a part of which the cliff jutted over like a leaning tower.

The trail did not end at the edge of the cliff as he had supposed, but led downward toward the valley over a succession of steps, making a journey from which the bravest might shrink with blanched cheek.

He crawled to the first natural step and looked at the snow.

A horse had gone down the dangerous trail, but certainly not after dark.

While the boy was inspecting the new trail a puff of wind coming up from below, bore to Roving Rifle the odor of a wood fire.

He started and turned to the little valley again.

He now knew what had attracted Black Pawnee and caused his halt a while before; the steed's keen scent had detected the fire.

"You sha'n't risk your neck going down there to-night," said the little scout to his horse. "I will inspect the place myself."

He threw the bridle back over the horse's head, and with a farewell stroke of his neck, crept toward the steps again.

This time he kept on with his repeating-rifle in his hand.

He did not seem to disturb the light snow as he went downward.

Foot by foot he kept on until the bottom of

the crazy trail was reached, then he halted a moment for breath.

The track of the horse which had descended before him was still visible; it led him toward the center of the valley for a short distance, when it suddenly turned back to the cliffs.

Roving Rifle followed with his hand on the trigger of his unerring rifle.

He moved on until he saw the wall of the cliffs before him again.

A minute afterward he saw something more than these—the half-dimmed glimmer of coals!

The Indian's camp at last!

For several minutes the little scout did not move.

Crouched in the snow he watched the glimmer, and tried to make out the fire's surroundings.

At first the camp seemed to be entirely deserted, but at last Roving Rifle made out an object which gradually developed into the form of a man.

After this discovery he had no difficulty in making out the outlines of an Indian.

The warrior, who seemed to be the only occupant of the camp under the overhanging cliff, sat on a short log with his blanket wrapped close about his form, and his feathered scalp-lock towering grotesquely above it.

Not a muscle seemed to move in the Indian's frame.

He sat stolid and statue-like on the log, guarding or sleeping at his sorry fire, which gave forth no heat, and precious little light.

Wolf-like, hugging the snow, Roving Rifle crept forward again without having taken his eyes from the brave a moment from the discovery.

Was it Big Bison?—that is what the boy wanted to know.

Nearer and nearer, inch by inch, crept Roving Rifle.

The Indian on the log had his back toward the young scout, and his must be sharp ears to hear the youngster's approach.

When within ten feet of the lone brave, Custer's little scout moved to the left and then crept toward the warrior again.

All at once he stopped, and a gleam of triumph lighted up his eyes.

"I've reached you at last, Bison!" he ejaculated. "You will never warn the allied tribes of Custer's coming. Black Kettle will never thank you for your long ride with a wound in your bosom. I said I would follow and find you this side of the Wichita. I have done both despite Lean Bear, my red foster father."

Roving Rifle slung his sixteen-shooter and drew his trusty knife.

Gripping it tightly with his right hand he moved on again, ready for the spring and the stroke which would end the Indian spy's career.

The bullet would have proved the surest agent of death, but the report might place on the little scout's trail enemies of the direst kind.

The knife made no noise, and in good hands it was a certain weapon.

All at once Roving Rifle leaped up and drew back the long, stout blade.

But five feet separated him from the one tenant of the winter camp.

"Now for it," he grated. "Big Bison, your trail ends here!"

He spoke the words aloud, but the Indian did not stir.

The next moment, carried forward by a tremendous bound, Roving Rifle landed at Big Bison's side.

His hand fell upon the blanket that covered the Arapahoe's shoulders with a force great enough to startle the soundest sleeper.

"What's the matter here?" exclaimed the boy scout, letting the uplifted knife fall harmless at his side. "Why don't you fight me, old fellow? I am here—I, Roving Rifle!"

There was no answer, and leaping over the log the border boy raised the Indian's head.

One look and an exclamation of horror parted his lips.

Big Bison's eyes had a cold, expressionless stare.

His rifle and tomahawk lay in the snow at his feet, and one hand was pressed against his breast under the blanket.

"Dead! this side of Black Kettle's camp!" said Roving Rifle, surveying the scene. "You came a long ways from Camp Supply to die, I'm thinking. Your secret has perished with you, Big Bison. I can now go back to Custer."

Weakened by loss of blood and the long ride, Big Bison, the Arapahoe spy, had kindled a little fire under the cliff in the valley, and died there, making no sign, and with no one near.

Roving Rifle's trail had ended, and he could now go back to Custer and delight California Joe with the news of the Bison's death.

He did not think of Lean Bear and his brother braves as he stood beside the red spy's corpse. He might meet them again.

He searched the camp.

A horse's trail led from it toward the southwest, but he did not care for that.

The horse could not betray Custer.

CHAPTER VII.

SHOOTING EXTRAORDINARY.

ROVING RIFLE knew where, by good riding and no accidents, he would strike Custer's army on its way to the Wichita country.

Many miles separated him from the Union general, miles of hostile trails and dangers from which brave men would have shrunk.

He had found Big Bison, and it was now his duty to go back to Custer, to whom he knew he would be useful.

After a brief rest in the camp guarded by the dead Arapahoe, Roving Rifle sprang upon Black Pawnee's back, and turned his head toward the east.

He took with him as a trophy of his hunt the tomahawk found at Big Bison's feet.

California Joe knew the weapon, and to the old scout it would be proof enough that the Arapahoe was no more.

All alone, the little scout galloped noiselessly through the unbroken snow that covered like a white shroud the solitary landscape.

The endurance of his horse was something wonderful.

Even after the long ride after Big Bison the animal seemed as fresh as when he left Custer's camp; he was ready to catch the slightest sound, and eager to carry his young master back to the troops struggling southward through the snow.

The night wore away at last, and showed Roving Rifle a wide plain of white, beyond which a line of hills rose against the cold November sky.

He drew rein and threw a look across the landscape.

Suddenly his eyes seemed to see an object endowed with life, for they kindled, and he unslung the rifle which until that moment he had carried on his back from the Indian camp.

"It moves toward me, sure enough!" exclaimed Roving Rifle, "I do not want to encounter anybody at this stage of my return journey. The whole country must swarm with warriors of the allied tribes, but in spite of them all, I must get back to Custer."

His keen eyes had made out more than one object moving from the hills directly toward him, and as he gazed, he saw that he faced a party of Indians moving in single file across the snowy plain.

A thinly wooded belt of land lay behind him, and more than two miles of plain stretched between him and the mounted braves.

He could turn and take the back trail, but he would be followed; flight would mean to the Indians that he was an enemy, and the pursuit might result badly to him.

These thoughts passed swiftly through Roving Rifle's mind.

"If they be Cheyenne hunters I have not much to fear," he said; "but if they are Kiowas or 'Rapahoes look out."

The Indians moving with the stiff breeze threw a scent ahead that made Black Pawnee's nostrils dilate, and he threw forward his pointed ears.

"What are they, old boy—friends or foes?" asked the boy. "Ha! they see us!"

At that moment the Indian line of march became changed, and six or seven were now riding abreast.

The strong light that heralded the rising sun was in Roving Rifle's face, so he shaded his eyes with his hands.

That instant every Indian fell forward on his horse's neck thus concealing his body from the boy.

"I can't make them out yet," he said. "Cheyennes and Kiowas both play that game. They dare not straighten up now!"

The Indians were less than a mile from Custer's little scout, and while he spoke they increased their speed and came on at a rapid rate.

"I must find the rascals out. They don't look much like Cheyennes from what I can see; but here goes!"

The next moment his repeating-rifle struck his shoulder, and he sent a ringing voice over the barrel.

"Stand!" was spoken in the Kiowa tongue, and at sound of his voice each horse stopped in the snow and the riders straightened into statues on their blankets.

"'Rapahoes!" exclaimed Roving Rifle. "There can be no peace between us. Who are you?" he asked the band.

"We are hunters of the Arapahoe nation," came the answer from the lips of a stalwart Indian in the center of the line. "The snow drives us back to the lodges of the tribe. We come back hungry and without meat, for the game has fled before the white feathers of the Great Spirit. Who speak to the Arapahoe hunters?"

"I am Roving Rifle, of the Kiowas," said the boy, boldly.

"Lean Bear's little son?"

"The same."

The little scout believed that he saw the Indian's eyes kindle.

"It's coming now; the truth has stirred them up. They remember the great horse-raid into their dominion by Lean Bear and his band three years ago. They know that I am the boy who rode with the raiders."

Roving Rifle had scarcely ceased ere the Indians snatched up the leathern lines they had dropped upon their horses' necks.

"Stay where you are, hunters of the 'Rapahoe nation!" exclaimed Roving Rifle, his cheek dropping to the stock of his rifle again. "We have met for the first time since the horses were missed from your corral. Ha! you know me now!"

The wild whoop that answered the boy scout was not needed to tell him that he was fully recognized by the red hunters who confronted him.

But two hundred yards of snow lay between them, and an Indian dash would quickly cover the distance.

The menace of the rifle which the Arapahoes evidently knew the young scout could use with deadly effect kept the horses back, but the red hunters could not be kept at bay long.

Suddenly every form dropped to the horses' necks again, and the next instant nothing was visible but the buckskin fringe of a score of leggings.

Then a startling yell pealed out, and the Arapahoes dashed at the boy.

Not a muscle quivered and as his eyes caught sight of a thigh for a moment he touched the trigger, and with a howl of pain an Indian fell wounded on the snow.

"One!" murmured Custer's little scout. "Ha! they are going to 'ring' me. They want to capture me for the torture, which they shall never do."

The tactics of the hunting-party were now apparent, for the members of it had divided, a part moving to the right, while the remainder urged their steeds to the left.

Their plan was to form a circle around the scout so as to hem him in and render escape impossible by the contracting of the living ring.

It was a wild moment in the boy's career.

He was surrounded before he could give a second shot, and could only watch the furious braves as they encircled him, disturbing the snow in clouds, and making the welkin ring with soul-piercing whoops.

"This can't last always. I must make a dash for it," he said. "Pawnee, you must match

yourself against the best hunters of the 'Rapa-hoe nation."

Among the red riders was one whom Roving Rifle had watched for some time.

He was a young, well-built warrior, who seemed desirous of winning his first feathers by a bold exploit, and at times he seemed on the eve of dashing straight at the boy scout.

Roving Rifle tried hard to cover this hunter, but the Arapahoe deftly concealed his body on the furthest side of his horse, while he eyed the scout through the flowing mane.

"I'll make him show himself," said Roving Rifle, suddenly. "I am wanted where Custer is. Here comes my Indian."

The little scout watched the conspicuous warrior closely until he was nearly opposite his position, and all at once, with a word to the black horse, he went at him like a thunderbolt.

"I'll bring you up, red snake!" shouted the boy in loud tones.

An instant later the Arapahoe appeared in sight, for a terrible collision was inevitable.

A shout of triumph rose from Roving Rifle's throat, and the crack of the rifle which he fired without placing it at his shoulder ended the young brave's career!

The quickness of the boy scout's action seemed to disconcert the Indians for a moment.

It had broken the circle, and made a gap through which Roving Rifle could ride.

Did he seize the opportunity, need the reader ask?

The stricken Indian had hardly touched the snow before Black Pawnee leaped over his body, and the next moment was flying eastward, or toward the hills like a swallow.

"Now for Custer, or the stake!" exclaimed the boy on the Indian saddle.

A wild yell announced pursuit.

The circle had been broken for all that day, and the Arapahoes were flying after the little scout with eyes on fire and heels beating the rowels of their steeds without a moment's cessation.

The chase was exciting from the first.

Suddenly Roving Rifle drew from an inner pocket a small oval mirror which was fastened to the end of a steel rod.

"I'll show them the latest trick in target-shooting," he said, with a smile, as he fastened the little rod into the stock of his rifle.

Then, throwing the weapon across his shoulder with the muzzle turned toward the yelling group pressing on in his rear, he looked into the mirror which now faced him.

A moment sufficed for him to get the positions of the various warriors by means of the little glass, and then his rifle spoke again.

The ringing shot was followed by a wild cry, and the little object that was seen to move in the mirror at the end of the rifle, was a full-grown Indian with a bullet in his head!

Roving Rifle sent up a shout of victory.

The Arapahoes answered it with one of defiance and came on.

They thought that the effect of the backward shot was accidental; Roving Rifle could not do it again.

The little scout read the Indians' thoughts.

"One shot doesn't break the glass!" he said

with a light laugh. "I'll convince you of this, my red boys."

Again the little mirror was tested as before, and the second shot was followed by another death-cry as one of his hunters fell from his plunging steed.

Another instant the Arapahoes sat motionless on their halted horses.

"No more hunt Roving Rifle," said their leader. "Him g t eye in the back of his head."

If the little scout could have heard these words he would have answered with a laugh, but Black Pawnee was bearing him rapidly from the astonished Indians, and the snow hills soon hid them from his view.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOODWINKING CUSTER.

"HERE I am again, general!"

It was near the close of a bleak November day, and General Custer, riding at the head of his little army, was surprised to be greeted as above by the buckskin-clad boy who reined in a splendid black steed before him.

"What! is it you? By my life, boy, I am glad to see you!"

Off went Custer's glove as he spoke, and he shook hands with Roving Rifle in whose eyes pride and victory were commingled.

"I generally manage to keep right side up with care," replied the boy scout, a merry twinkle observable in his dark obs. "I had several tussles for my scalp this time, general, but I still own the whole top knot as you see," and Roving Rifle uncovered to the dashing Indian-fighter.

"Where is Big Bison?" asked Custer with eagerness.

"Among the Kyamas Hills with lips forever sealed. California Joe told you of my mission, I suppose."

"Yes, and I have been anxious about you ever since, but your safe return has relieved me of all my fears. Here, place yourself alongside and tell me the whole story as we move on."

Accepting the invitation with a glow of pride, Roving Rifle was soon riding beside Custer who listened attentively to the narrative of the hunt for Big Bison and the subsequent return to the army.

"Who is this Noreta to warn whom you sent your Indian brother. One Belt, to the villages on the Wichita?" suddenly asked Custer at the conclusion of the story.

"She is an Indian girl, the ward of Swift Water, an Indian of whom you may have heard."

"I happen to know the old fellow. I cannot say that I know anything good of your future father-in-law."

"My future father-in-law! ho! ho! ho!" laughed Roving Rifle, without so much as a permissive look from Custer.

"Come, come, boy; the laugh betrays you," was the good-natured retort. "Noreta no doubt is as pretty as her name, and I long to see your choice. But do you think your warning will reach her?"

"Why should it not?"

"Certain Indians may intercept One Belt."

"I am not afraid of that. That boy is one of the shrewdest red-skins on the Southwest border. He is capable of proving a valuable help to your march, general. Having warned Noreta he will turn back to join me. Now that I am back, I am ready for work. Have you any for me?"

"I have work for some one to-night," replied Custer very seriously.

"Can't I do it?"

"I do not know. I had thought of intrusting my Indian scouts with it. Would they dare to enter the Wichita villages in advance of the army?"

"Are your scouts Osages?"

"Yes."

"Then the kind of a mission your words suggest would prove very dangerous. An Osage Indian in Black Kettle's camp would have but one chance in a hundred in his favor. Why, general, there is a saying among the Kiowas and Cheyennes, that their dogs can smell an Osage fifty miles."

Custer did not reply for a moment.

"I am very anxious to obtain information from the far front—I mean, of course, from the red villages. If our advance is known there, it is important that we should be advised of it."

"Let me undertake the task, general."

"You?"

"Why not? I'm more than half Indian," an Roving Rifle smiled.

"They want you at those villages very bad at this time. You might encounter Lean Bear and the Arapahoes there."

"All that you have said is true, general, but I am not compelled to enter Black Kettle's camp as Roving Rifle, General Custer's scout."

"Of course not; but—"

"Let me show you," interrupted the boy in a respectful manner. "Please excuse me, general."

Drawing back with a half military salute which he had caught from the officers while at Camp Supply, Roving Rifle wheeled his steed and dashed off at a gallop followed by the eye of Custer who seemed to take a great interest in him.

The army at the time was passing through a hilly district with California Joe and the Osage scouts in the advance.

All at once a shout was raised in the front and the big scout was seen leading a prisoner toward the head of the column.

The captive was an Indian youth whose arm was encircled by Joe's giant fingers, and he moved along with a sullen, glowering cast of countenance, the very embodiment of stubbornness.

"Where did you get him?" asked Custer, leaning from his saddle as California Joe halted before him with his prize.

"Whar he hadn't no bizness ter be, gin'ral," was the reply. "He war keepin' an eye on us when Hard Rope happened ter spy him, an' afore he could git away, we kivered him an' made him s'and. He's a likely young red peeler, gin'ral—jes' the kind we don't want ter see now. Bless my picter! ef he's said three words since I clapped my hands on him. You kin see

what he is, gin'ral, a Cheyenne to ther back bone—one of Black Kettle's baby braves."

Near the conclusion of California Joe's speech, the prisoner drew his form up and looked daggers at the scout who burst into a loud laugh.

"Looks ain't arrows, my young red fox!" he cried. "Jes' look at them eyes, gin'ral. Ain't they daisy peepers?"

Looking straight into the captive's face Custer asked:

"What is your name?"

To California Joe's utter surprise the Indian spoke without hesitation.

"Little Wildcat," he said.

"True to name, too, by hokey!" ejaculated the scout, whom Custer silenced abruptly with a glance.

"Where are you from?" continued the general.

"From the villages to the south."

"Is Black Kettle there?"

The prisoner's lips remained closed.

"Do the Indians look for me?" asked Custer.

"Can a flock of crows fly across the sky without being seen?"

Custer and California Joe exchanged looks.

"They know, then, that I am on the march! You were watching the army when captured?"

"Little Wildcat was on a trail of his own," was the haughty response. "The big white scout found him among the hills, and he now stands before Yellow Hair, the great chief of the blue warriors. His fame has reached to all the lodges of the red-men; they know that when Yellow Hair marches on them they must fight or pull down their tepees and move to other grounds. Great is Yellow Hair. Brave are the warriors he leads from the forts in the north."

"That's mighty complimentary from an Injun, gin'ral!" exclaimed Joe. "You hev'n't a commission fer the young pard fer all thet hifalutin', have ye?"

Custer smiled.

"I'm afraid your compliments are wasted," he said to the prisoner. "We dispense with such things on the frontier. Will your people fight?"

"When did they ever run from Yellow Hair? They whipped the big white chief last summer. They forced him north to the great strong forts of his people."

"But I am not General Sully," replied Custer sharply, and with kindling eyes. "I am here to strike your people a blow they will not soon forget."

"We will see, Yellow Hair."

At that moment Custer started and a surprised look suddenly filled his eyes.

About the corners of the prisoner's mouth was a slight smile which had just met the general's gaze.

"I've been completely hoodwinked!" he said to himself, and then continued in a loud strain to California Joe:

"Let the boy go, Joe. We're not making war on such little fellows."

The old scout's eyes dilated, and he started back with an exclamation of amazement.

"Let this young grizzly go?" he said. "I've got a notion to disobey orders, gin'ral. Let the Injun loose to go ahead an' git things fixed fer us! What do you mean, gin'ral?"

Custer, so stern a few moments before, could hardly repress a laugh.

"He's not a dangerous red-skin," he said. "Maybe you don't know him, Joe?"

"I don't want to become any better acquainted. If I had had my way when we corraled him he wouldn't be standin' hyer boastin' of what the Injuns intend to do to us in the Wichita kentry. However, if I must let him go I give him notice thet the next time, he'll not be marched up to Gin'ral Custer."

California Joe stepped back and his bronze hand fell from the prisoner's arm.

"What do you think now, general?" exclaimed the Indian, alt ring his tone. "Won't I do for the work you want done?"

"Great Jehosaphat! Rovin' Rifle! Confound yer picters, boy! why didn't you give me the wink? I'm skunked, gin'ral!—clean wiped out! Look hyer! I've a mind ter shake ye up a little."

Unable to keep back his merriment any longer, General Custer burst into a hearty laugh, which proved infectious, for his general officers soon joined in, much to California Joe's chagrin.

"Fooled by a boy!" he cried. "Gin'ral, you kin send the chap on any kind of mission. He'll do. I'll back Rovin' Rifle ag'in' the world!"

"I am more than satisfied," said Custer, addressing Roving Rifle, whose quick smile had unmasked himself. "I did not think you could hoodwink me, an old plainsman, so completely. If you are still desirous of undertaking the mission I have suggested, I will give you the necessary orders."

"I am your scout, General Custer. You have but to command Roving Rifle."

"Come here."

The boy advanced to Custer's side.

"You may not be able to report in person?" he said.

"If I do not, a report will be made."

"By whom?"

"By One Belt, or Noreta."

Custer looked down into the boy's eyes, and read calm determination there.

"Come to me in twenty minutes for instructions, although I don't think you need many," he said. "I don't like to send you among the hostiles, but your little game just played tells me that you will succeed."

"I will succeed, general," said the little scout, promptly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAMP ON THE WICHITA.

NIGHT had closed around the little army advancing toward the country of the hostiles, when General Custer took Roving Rifle's hand, and wished him success on his dangerous mission.

The boy's duty, as detailed by the officer, was simply this: To enter the land of the hostile nations encamped on the banks of the Wichita, ascertain their strength in warriors and their exact location, but above all things to discover whether Custer's advance was known to them.

The American general was desirous of taking

the tribes by surprise, for in secrecy and strategy lay complete success.

It was noticed that, instead of a handsome black horse which was symmetry itself in every limb, a beautiful piebald steed bore Roving Rifle from Custer's camp.

"I like to serve General Custer," exclaimed the little scout, as he guided his horse along the trails that meandered among the hills. "He's every inch a man, and if I don't keep my word with him, may Black Kettle slit my ears!"

The Indian villages were not far from the An'elope Hills which are near the western boundary of the Indian Territory.

It was known that they contained hundreds of warriors under the command of Black Kettle the Cheyenne, and Santanta the Kiowa.

The United States authorities thought that a winter campaign would strike terror to the hearts of the hostiles who had of late perpetrated a number of inhuman massacres.

The red warriors had raided a peaceful country, throwing it into a state of terror, running off stock and butchering the inhabitants.

The policy of our generals before Custer had been to start out on an Indian campaign in warm weather, and with a good deal of pomp.

They made no secret movements, kept no plans to themselves, and the result of the campaigns was defeat.

The Indians knew of the army's approach, prepared ambushes, and opposed to it, when it came, a front that invariably drove it back in confusion.

With all Custer's secrecy he feared that Black Kettle and his brother chiefs might have become informed of his approach.

He did not intend to march blindly into an ambush; he had been ordered to chastise the hostiles, not to be chastised by them.

The army was not moving fast toward the south, for the general wanted to hear from Roving Rifle as far from the Indian towns as possible.

One night a wild yell was heard just beyond the confines of the main village of the hostiles on the Wichita.

Instantly the tepees began to send forth their tenants, men, women, children and dogs, and the whole village was soon in an uproar.

A delegation of chiefs sprung upon the unblanketed backs of some horses and galloped toward the north, or in the direction from whence the yell had come.

In a short time they returned escorting five or six braves on foot.

The new-comers were instantly surrounded by the population of the village and torches lit up the scene.

"Lean Bear and his brothers have been long on the way; they are hungry," said Black Kettle, addressing the crowd that stared at the gaunt visages of the visitors.

This announcement was enough. A number of Indian women went to the tepees and brought back some meat which was set before the strangers, who occupied the middle of the circle which had been formed about them.

The whole village looked on while Lean Bear and his companions satisfied their hunger.

Among these spectators was an Indian boy

whose countenance told how anxious he was to hear the visitors talk.

He was not more than sixteen, if, indeed, he had reached that age; but he was well built, had broad shoulders, a deep chest, and looked like a young Indian athlete.

Darker eyes than his there were none in the whole Indian camp, and they never left Lean Bear and his friends while they ravenously tore the half-cooked meat from the bones.

He stood in the shadow thrown by a warrior's body, but his eyes saw every movement calculated to interest him.

Lean Bear was the first of the party to announce his appetite appeased.

He sprung up and whirled upon Black Kettle and the principal chiefs who stood in a group waiting for him to speak.

"Lean Bear is hungry no longer, and his brothers have eaten their fill," he exclaimed. "They found no game; the snow has driven it to the far south where the skies are not cold. They have caught nothing for several days. Ah! yes! they did catch one thing. Lean Bear laid his hands on his bad son. He caught Roving Rifle!"

If any suspicious person had been watching the Indian boy at that time he would have seen him start slightly, and, breathless and more anxious than before, he leaned forward and kept his eyes riveted on Lean Bear.

"Where is Lean Bear's lost son?" asked Black Kettle.

"He escaped from the trap into which he crept, expecting to find the Big Bison of the Arapahoe nation."

A little group of Arapahoe warriors then in Black Kettle's camp pressed forward.

"Where is Big Bison?" asked their leader.

Lean Bear drew from beneath his blanket a scalping-knife and a beaded belt, which the Arapahoes recognized with a shout.

"Lean Bear found Big Bison in his last camp," he went on, holding the objects up to the gaze of all. "Roving Rifle's trail led to the camp. Does Raw Robe ask now how Bison died?"

"No!" thundered the Arapahoe chief. "The white Indian's trail tells him all. Roving Rifle followed Big Bison and, sneaking upon him like a wolf, carried off his scalp."

"He was not scalped, my brother," said Lean Bear.

"Scalped or not, Roving Rifle shall die for it!" was the wild answer. "He is Lean Bear's son, but his blood shall flow."

"Lean Bear will not stand between Roving Rifle and Raw Robe, the Arapahoe. He loves his son no longer. He will light the fires about him if Raw Robe fastens him to the stake."

The eyes of the listening Indian boy flashed like mad stars, and his hands were clinched.

The death of Big Bison threw the Arapahoes into a frenzy that was terrible to see.

They drew their tomahawks and set up a wild dance, to the din of which they added yells and scalp-whoops that seemed to shake the stars which looked down upon the scene.

Woe to Roving Rifle, Custer's little scout, if he falls into the hands of these demons of the Southwest border.

The exciting dance lasted for some minutes, at the end of which Raw Robe and his companions appeared to be pretty well exhausted, and Lean Bear began again.

He told Black Kettle that he had nothing definite from Custer, but that Roving Rifle had said that the army still lay at Fort Hays, one of the posts in Kansas.

This information was greeted with shouts of satisfaction, at which the eyes of the Indian boy glowed with delight.

"What does Raw Robe say? He and his brethren have been on the hunt toward the north. What does he know about Yellow Hair?"

"Nothing. Raw Robe saw no blue-coats. They do not hunt us when the ground is white, but when the leaves are green, and the sun shines warm. Yellow Hair will not come to the Wichita while it is cold. His braves will keep close to the fires in their big, strong lodge, where the great guns are.

Another outburst of Indian applause greeted this speech.

Black Kettle and his sub-chiefs appeared satisfied.

The whole camp seemed relieved by Raw Robe's words.

The red-skins feared Custer, or Yellow Hair as they called him, because of his long locks which at that time fell gracefully over his shoulders.

He was not to disturb them that winter, and the warriors could take their ease in the tepees on the Wichita. In the spring they could go forth again to new raids and new deeds of violence.

In honor of his visitors Black Kettle ordered a dance, which at once began.

The whole village joined in the hilarity which no pen can describe.

Several hours passed away, but it did not abate.

Louder and louder grew the noise, until a person a short distance from the camp would have thought that the doors of Bedlam had been thrown wide.

To all this barbarous festivity the Indian youth of whom we have several times spoken, was a witness.

The wild proceedings seemed to interest him.

At last he joined in the savage dance, and went round and round with the maddest of them.

Above the uproar often rose the voices of the warriors defying Custer and his little army, at that very moment on the trail of vengeance.

They dared him to leave his winter-quarters, invited him to attack the camp, and threatened him with complete destruction.

"They will see Yellow Hair before many days," murmured the Indian boy as he left the uproar. "The blue-coats will blow their bugles on the banks of the Wichita when the red braves are asleep. Lean Bear did not kill Roving Rifle. I am glad; but if Raw Robe finds him, he will not escape so easily."

At that moment the Indian boy was being approached by a figure that made no noise as it glided toward him.

All at once it stopped beside the youth, and a hand fell upon his arm.

"Who touches One Belt?" said the boy, wheeling quickly.

"I do," was the reply. "Where are One Belt's eyes to-night?"

The Indian boy started.

He was confronted by a youth of his own age, and similarly clad.

"One Belt's eyes are in his head," he said. "Roving Rifle, my brother, what brings you here?"

"Business for Yellow Hair!"

CHAPTER X.

ROVING RIFLE IN THE TOILS.

ONE BELT, the Indian boy, threw a searching glance around before he spoke again.

He was deeply concerned about Roving Rifle's safety. He had not dreamed that Custer's little scout would seek Black Kettle's camps; but he was here in the very jaws of death, for he was surrounded by Indians who thirsted for his blood.

If detected and recognized nothing would save him; his boyhood passed among the tribes would not militate in his favor.

"Come, my brother," said One Belt at last, touching Roving Rifle's arm. "One Belt wishes you had remained with Yellow Hair. He is not glad to see you here. Did you listen to the chiefs to-night?"

"I heard all—not a word escaped me."

"They don't dream of Yellow Hair's march. When his big horns blow they will rush from their lodges to bleed in the snow."

"That is true; but where is Noreta?"

"Here."

"Here still?" exclaimed Roving Rifle, in astonishment. "You were to warn her?"

"I did."

"And she does not fly?"

"She will not stir."

"Why not?"

"Because she says that Yellow Hair's soldier's will not march through the snow. She does not believe that the men with the fair skins will march when it is so cold. Then, she says that Roving Rifle is not here to tell her this."

"I am here now," said the boy scout. "She will listen to me, One Belt. I did not think she would not hear you."

"Such a thought never entered One Belt's head; but the Indians smile when they think of Yellow Hair's troops marching through the snow."

"Where is Noreta?" asked the white boy, eagerly.

"In her tepee."

"Guide me to it."

Clad as he was in real Indian garments, with his face dyed, and a master of the different languages spoken in the villages along the banks of the Wichita, Roving Rifle considered himself pretty safe.

He had reached the scene of his labors without accident, and although he had been but a short time there, he was ready to report to Custer.

The savages were ignorant of the advance;

even if informed of it, they would have scoffed at the informer.

Secure, as they thought, in their winter-quarters, they did not fear Custer, and Black Kettle had planned new forays for the next spring.

One Belt started off with Roving Rifle when the latter requested to be shown to Noreta's lodge.

"Will you go when you have seen Noreta?" he asked the scout.

"Go where?"

"Back to Yellow Hair."

"Yes, I will go. The braves do not look for the blue-coats. My report is ready."

A minute later One Belt halted in front of a neat bark lodge whose door was a buffalo-skin, and turned to his companion with a meaning look.

"Noreta is in there," he said, in a low tone.

"Wait for me here."

Roving Rifle drew the robe aside as he spoke and stepped across the simple threshold.

He did not see the object which lay like a sleeping dog at the rear of the lodge, neither did One Belt's watchful eyes.

The interior of the lodge was quite gloomy to Roving Rifle when he first entered, but as a certain sound fell upon his ears, he caught sight of a figure that moved from a corner.

"One Belt?" said a sweet silvery voice, and a hand whose touch was as soft as silk fell on his wrist.

Roving Rifle, scarcely able to keep back a cry of joy, put out his arms and drew the speaker to him.

"Roving Rifle instead of One Belt," he said in whispers that made the listener start.

"No! Roving Rifle would not enter the camp where the Indian braves want his blood!" cried the girl, who was none other than Noreta.

"I am here. I am here to tell you what One Belt has already told you. Noreta, you must go."

"When Roving Rifle says 'go,' Noreta will not stay. He knows best," was the reply that thrilled the boy's heart. "When shall Noreta fly?"

"Before another sleep."

"She will obey; but her white friend?"

"I will go back to Yellow Hair."

"And help him?"

"Yes."

One Belt, who had stationed himself at the entrance to the tent did not catch a word of the foregoing conversation, which was spoken in cautious tones; but the living spy behind the lodge had heard enough to bind Roving Rifle to the stake.

When the boy scout's name reached his ears he glided away unseen by One Belt, for, knowing that the Indian keeper stood guard before the tepee, he kept it between him and his keen eyes, and disappeared without having been seen.

Roving Rifle was still conversing with Noreta when the buffalo-curtain was suddenly jerked aside, and One Belt appeared to the startled twain.

"Come! we must go!" he said to the boy scout. "The red snakes crawl over the ground."

"Go, Roving Rifle," said the red girl. "Noreta will leave the village before Yellow Hair comes."

The little scout pressed Noreta's hand, and drawing his revolver turned away with One Belt.

"What have you seen?" he asked his comrade.

"The crawl of the serpents," was the reply.

"A spy must have followed us!" said Roving Rifle, grating his teeth.

"One Belt cannot say. Look yonder, my brother."

The red youth pointed as he spoke toward a spot not far from the lodge from which they had just stepped, and Roving Rifle, using his eyes to good advantage, saw a dark object there.

The situation was critical.

Well did Custer's boy scout know that the object which had met his gaze was an Indian, and, of course, an enemy.

For a moment the two young friends remained in front of Noreta's lodge; then Roving Rifle started forward.

He kept his eyes on the crouching figure, but moved to the left of it with his finger at the trigger of the revolver he carried at his side.

Suddenly he stopped as well he might for directly in his front rose two figures which had been hugging the ground while they waited for him.

Up went Roving Rifle's arm; but One Belt's hand instantly encircled it.

"No fight, brother," he whispered at the boy scout's ear. "The red snakes are all around you. You must not shoot."

One Belt pushed the arm down while he spoke, and the next instant the two boys were completely surrounded.

Indians appeared on every hand as if by magic, and in less than a minute after the discovery Roving Rifle seemed to be in the midst of the whole camp.

The first one to seize the boy scout was Raw Robe, the Arapahoe who was so eager to avenge Big Bison's death.

He lifted Roving Rifle from the ground and held him up to the clamorous crowd with an exultant whoop.

The fury of the Arapahoe warriors knew no bounds, and Roving Rifle would have been summarily dealt with at once if Black Kettle had not put in an appearance.

He ordered a guard to surround the captives, which was done, and they were then conducted to the square where the orgies of the night had taken place.

Roving Rifle's revolver had of course been jerked from his hand, and the Indians thought they had entirely disarmed him, but it was with a thrill of joy that he felt a second weapon on the inside of his buckskin frock.

"I'll keep it for the red betrayer, if I find him!" he said to himself.

Roving Rifle and One Belt were conducted to the middle of the open space and left there unbound.

Why bind two boys who were surrounded by more than one thousand Indians, three hundred

of whom were the most noted warriors of the allied tribes?

Shoulder to shoulder in the glare of the torches stood the two friends, both the very picture of Indian boys, yet, under a profusion of paint, the skin of one was white.

All at once Black Kettle strode into the circle, cast his body robe upon the trampled snow, and stepping upon it faced the prisoners.

"Under his paint Roving Rifle wears a white skin, Two Beavers tells me," he said, his eyes fixed upon Custer's scout. "What does he say?"

Roving Rifle made no reply, but whispered to his companion.

"Two Beavers is the miserable spy. Do you know him?"

"Yes. He has made love to Noreta."

"The red wretch! I'll do Custer a service if he shows himself."

At that moment Black Kettle's voice was heard calling Two Beavers into the inclosure.

He had not ceased when there stepped forward a young brave with an insulting bearing, and triumphant eyes—the spy who had been crouched at Noreta's wigwam.

Roving Rifle eyed him madly from the first.

"Go forward and tell the Indians which of the prisoners has a white skin," said Black Kettle to the advancing red-skins whose motion resembled the crawl of the serpent.

With burning orbs fixed on Roving Rifle, Two Beavers glided toward the pair.

"You will go to Custer with the news that Black Kettle dreams not of his march," whispered the boy scout to One Belt as his fingers encircled the butt of the revolver beneath his frock. "You sneaking brave shall never boast of his triumph after to night."

At that instant Two Beavers halted within fifteen feet of the boys.

He faced Roving Rifle and all at once his arm shot forward.

"Behold the white skinned spy!" he exclaimed glancing at Black Kettle on the body-robe a few feet away. "Two Beavers heard him speak his name to-night while he had his ear to the lodge whose buffalo-skin Roving Rifle brushed aside."

"Whose lodge was it?" asked Black Kettle.

"Two Beavers's voice will not betray the flower that thrives in his heart."

"And the flower which you will never win, red wretch!"

With the last word Roving Rifle took a step forward beyond the reach of One Belt's arm.

His hand left his breast at the same moment, and Two Beavers's flew to his belt, but too late.

The scene was lightened by the flash and crack of a revolver, and the Indian spy dropped with a bullet in his brain!

It was the work of an instant, and for a moment the whole crowd seemed paralyzed.

Roving Rifle stood where he had halted with the smoking weapon in his hand.

"Custer wouldn't approve of this kind of work, I know," he said to himself. "My chances are not good ones now, but I'll take them cheerfully, since I have killed the meanest red-skin among the banded tribes."

His chances were desperate indeed.

Suddenly the whole population surged toward him.

He lifted his revolver again; but lowered it without firing, as if he had caught sight of a face that had deterred him.

A moment later he found himself in Black Kettle's grasp.

He looked around for One Belt; but he looked in vain.

The Indian boy had slipped away, and he was left to meet his fate alone.

He had told Custer that One Belt or Noreta would report to him if anything occurred.

Something had occurred.

The little scout was doomed.

CHAPTER XI.

GETTING OUT OF IT.

DURING his long residence among the Indians Roving Rifle had witnessed many displays of savage anger; but that which now greeted him exceeded anything of the kind he had ever seen.

Demonism not to be described seemed to have taken possession of the red-skins.

They surged about Black Kettle with drawn hatchets and knives, and made the welkin ring with bloodthirsty whoops.

They shook their weapons in the boy scout's face; but he did not start.

Two Beavers, the dead spy, was carried from the square, and covered with skins beyond the threshold of his own lodge, from which he would never venture again on the errand which had cost him his life.

Roving Rifle felt satisfied that One Belt had left the village, and was on his way to Custer.

The thought gave him an inward pleasure, for the young Indian fighter could advance without fear of ambush, and strike the blow the red Arabs of the Southwest would long remember.

For a while Roving Rifle expected to be brained by the infuriated Indians, foremost among whom were Raw Robe the Arapahoe and his companions; but the strong arm of Black Kettle, coupled to his gestures of authority, beat them back, and he breathed free once more.

"Let Roving Rifle listen to Black Kettle, and answer his questions," said the Cheyenne chief, addressing the youth in tones intended for the ears of the enraged assembly round about. "What brought him back to the Kiowas at this time?"

"The village of the Kiowas is dear to Roving Rifle," said the boy, looking the Cheyenne squarely in the eye.

"He has been a long time away. He did leave Lean Bear, his father, because he had a dream that on a new hunting-ground was a herd of white buffaloes which the Great Spirit would show to him. He went; he hunted long for the grazing-grounds of the white buffaloes, but the Great Spirit became angry at Roving Rifle, and drove the snowy game far to the north. Then he came back to his people. It is true that Lean Bear found him among the hills; the chief wanted to know where Yellow Hair and his soldiers were. Roving Rifle told him, but his red father and his brothers did not be-

lieve him. Roving Rifle saw anger in their eyes, and he fled from their clutches. He is here! He came back to live with his people again and to help them against Yellow Hair when he comes in the spring."

Not a word of the little scout's adroit answer had escaped the Indians.

"But he killed Two Beavers," said Black Kettle.

"Two Beavers played the spy against one of his people," was the ready retort. "The great law of the Kiowas says that the Indian who listens at his brother's lodge shall die, and who shall take his life but the Kiowa at whose lodge he listens?"

"Why did Roving Rifle kill Big Bison in his camp among the mountains?"

The young scout glanced at the speaker and saw that he had advanced from among his companions, and stood erect with flashing eyes and drawn hatchet.

It was Raw Robe himself, an Indian whose reputation for fierceness and valor no man in the Arapahoe nation dared question.

"Who says that Roving Rifle slew Big Bison?" said the boy boldly. "Can Raw Robe prove it? Oh, they bring the Bison's scalping-knife here and cast it on the ground saying: 'Roving Rifle stiffened the hand that used it. Roving Rifle sent his bullet to Big Bison's heart.' It is all talk. There are many trails in the snow, and from among them all the eyes of the Arapahoe picks out Roving Rifle's and says that it led from the Bison's last camp. How sharp is Raw Robe's eyes! The Great Spirit will transform him into an eagle one of these days."

Stung to the quick by the sarcastic tone of the little scout's last sentences, the Arapahoe warrior recoiled a step while angry flashes darted from his eyes.

"Black Kettle has heard Raw Robe," he exclaimed turning upon the village chief. "He has also listened to the slippery tale that has fallen from Roving Rifle's lips. Let him say what shall be done with the boy. Raw Robe and his warriors want satisfaction for Big Bison's blood. Speak, Black Kettle."

Roving Rifle believed that he had not spoken in vain.

There seemed to be a revulsion of feeling in his favor, and many eyes, fierce as a tiger's awhile before, now seemed full of sympathy.

"Why does Black Kettle hold his tongue?" cried the impatient Raw Robe, stamping madly on the ground. "Is there not a bond of brotherhood between the Arapahoes and the Cheyennes?"

"The people shall speak for Black Kettle," said the Cheyenne chief. "They shall vote for life or death."

"Let them vote!"

Raw Robe seemed to think that he had the red populace on his side, and was not averse to having the boy scout's fate decided by a vote of the warriors.

The chiefs of the Kiowas and Cheyennes, who owned the village conjointly, now formed their warriors in a circle in the middle of which stood Roving Rifle with arms folded, Indian-fashion, upon his breast.

Raw Robe and his comrades took up their station just without the ring.

The Kiowas, Roving Rifle's adopted nation, outnumbered the Cheyenne part of the village, and the boy picked out from among the warriors many familiar faces.

When the circle had been established a medicine-man appeared bearing a knotted war-club which he handed to one of the braves.

Roving Rifle watched the club.

For a moment the warrior held it aloft, then struck it on the ground three times in quick succession.

"One vote for death!" murmured Custer's little scout, and as the second brave passed the club he continued: "And one vote for life. Three blows on the ground mean death, two life. Thus far the vote runs evenly. It will be a close call no doubt."

Watched by every eye in the village, the war-stick passed quickly around the circle of half-naked braves.

The Cheyennes generally smote the ground three times with it; but the Kiowas struck only twice, and that gently.

Need we say that Roving Rifle's eyes kept tally as the club went round?

When it neared the place from whence it had started he ventured a glance at Raw Robe's face. It resembled a thunder-cloud, so dark and glowering it was, for the crafty Arapahoe had watched the circling club, and his lips had counted the votes for death.

"What do you say now?" ejaculated Roving Rifle in an undertone when the last warrior had voted. "You are not going to drink my blood, not to-night, at least."

The vote had indeed been a close call.

One hundred and fifty-six for death, and one hundred and sixty for life!

Roving Rifle seemed to increase an inch in stature when Black Kettle announced the result.

The Cheyenne, if he could have voted, would have struck the ground three times with the war-club; he would have sent Raw Robe away with Roving Rifle's blood on his hands.

A murmur of applause from those who had voted for life greeted Black Kettle's announcement, the others looked sullen and kept silence, all but one man.

"Come!" cried Raw Robe, to his braves. "The blood of Big Bison is as water to the Cheyennes and the Kiowas. We will break the bonds that bind the nations together! When Yellow Hair comes Black Kettle and his warriors shall fight him without the right arms of the Arapahoes to aid them."

The crowd parted as the maddened chief turned from the circle, and without another word he led his warriors away.

Black Kettle's eyes followed him for a moment, and then whispered something at the ear of a young brave who stood near.

Away bounded the Cheyenne after Raw Robe, and was soon lost to view.

"I am not safe yet," said Roving Rifle, who had taken notice of these proceedings. "That whisper means something. Black Kettle is my enemy!"

Shortly after the departure of Raw Robe,

the Cheyenne chief advanced to where the little scout stood.

"The warriors have acquitted you," he said. "Roving Rifle, you are free."

Free! free, when death stared him in the face but a moment before. The thought seemed hardly credible.

For a moment the boy scout did not move, and when he did it was to walk through a lot of braves who but for the result of the late vote would gladly have torn him piecemeal.

He passed through the village free, but by no means safe.

He knew that danger lurked on every hand; his enemies seemed as numerous as the stars that glittered overhead.

All at once he turned and passed to the right. When he paused it was at the door of a lodge not unlike the many by which it was surrounded.

Without hesitating a moment he drew aside the curtain of buffalo-skin and entered.

Darkness encountered him.

"Noreta?" he called twice in low tones.

There was no reply.

He repeated the name.

The next moment the curtain was flung aside and with a hiss and a spring, a human body fell against the little scout.

"The warriors voted for Roving Rifle's life, but Raw Robe condemns him to death!" was hissed at his ear.

"Ho! it is you, is it?" responded the boy scout as he struck the ground with his assailant. "I thought I hadn't done with you yet."

"Roving Rifle dies in the red village. His blood shall flow for Big Bison's death!"

"That is to be determined!" said Roving Rifle, getting at his knife at last, and having found in the darkness, with the other hand, the Arapahoe's throat, he aimed a blow as best he could and struck with all his might.

A cry of pain was heard, and as he withdrew his knife, he suddenly found himself free.

CHAPTER XII.

GOING BACK TO YELLOW HAIR.

OF course, being separated from his vindictive foe, Custer's little scout sprang to his feet.

Despite Raw Robe's unexpected attack by which he had been taken unawares, he had gained a bloody victory.

"This camp is getting too hot for me," he said. "Raw Robe's followers will try to accomplish that which their leader has failed to do. Noreta has already fled the village, and I must follow One Belt to the general."

He did not stoop to examine the body which he knew was lying at his feet, but pulled the curtain aside and looked out.

He saw the snow shining like a diamond-field in the starlight; but no human figures met his gaze.

Had the hunt for blood been ended by the taking of Raw Robe's life?

Roving Rifle would have answered this question in the negative.

He knew the Indian character too thoroughly to have answered it in any other way.

While an Arapahoe lived, a red avenging hand would be turned against him.

Knowing this, the little scout of the Southwest border stepped from the Kiowa lodge leaving Raw Robe lying amid the gloom he left behind.

Roving Rifle started straight toward the northern part of the camp.

Of course he made no noise in gliding through the snow, and no trail for that matter, for he walked in one of the beaten trails common to all Indian towns.

At the confines of the camp he stopped and gave a peculiar whistle which quickly brought to his side a magnificent piebald horse, which in symmetry and strength resembled Black Pawnee.

Resembled Black Pawnee did we say?

Black Pawnee it was, gentle reader. Certain dyes well known to the frontier strategist had altered the steed's appearance, and Black Pawnee was now a piebald, but with all his tricks and sagacity remaining.

Roving Rifle was stroking the horse's neck when a sharp whinny not from Pawnee's throat caused him to start.

Turning like a flash, the boy with one hand at the trigger of the rifle he had carried from Noreta's lodge saw two figures that instantly fixed his gaze.

"Halt!" he said warningly raising the weapon. "Stand where you are or—"

"Roving Rifle will not shoot me?"

"You? heavens, no!" exclaimed the boy, and a moment later an Indian girl stood before him, holding the bridle-reins of a fine horse.

Dressed picturesquely in wild Indian garments profusely beaded, Noreta—for it was she—looked romantically beautiful in the wintry starlight.

Her hair straight and black reached to her waist, which it hid whenever the wind spread the silken tresses.

Roving Rifle welcomed the red girl.

"I thought you had fled," he said. "I did not find you at the lodge. When will you go, Noreta?"

"Now."

"Yellow Hair will soon be here."

"So One Belt told me. The tribes do not dream of him. One Belt said that Roving Rifle fights for Yellow Hair."

"That I do. Don't you hate me for that?"

"Noreta cannot hate Roving Rifle. She is ready to follow him."

"To Yellow Hair?"

"Yes."

"The red-men may follow us."

"We will out-fly them. Let us go, Roving Rifle. Raw Robe's avengers may be on the trail now."

"Where is Raw Robe?"

"In Noreta's lodge."

"Then you know—"

"Noreta saw the Arapahoe enter her lodge, but only Roving Rifle came out. Raw Robe is there yet."

"May he stay there!" said the Boy Scout fiercely, then he turned to his horse.

"We will go," he said. "To Custer, girl—over the snow to Yellow Hair and his soldiers!"

The Indian maid was mounted before he had

finished, but ere he began the journey Roving Rifle listened toward the allied camp.

All at once a wild yell broke the stillness that hung over it, then another and another, each fiercer than its predecessor, till the whole welkin rung.

He knew what it meant.

"They have found, Raw Robe!" he said from between his teeth. "We cannot cover up our trail, Noreta; but the Arapahoes shall never pay me back for the blow in your tepee. Off we are!"

He leaned toward Noreta as he finished, seized her rein, spoke to both horses, and the race for life commenced.

Proud to have Noreta, his Indian love at his side, yet fearful of the results of the race, Roving Rifle looked often at the face so close to his.

"Why can't we outride those yells?" he said when more than five miles had been covered by the well-matched horses.

"They follow us," was the quick response. "The wolves of Black Kettle's camp are on our trail."

"Let them catch us if they can," laughed the boy scout. "Noreta, I carry here sixteen deaths for that mad red pack!" And he patted the elegant rifle which he held up to the faithful girl's gaze.

"Hark! They come nearer!" said Noreta when another mile had been traversed and a hilly district gained. "The horses of the Arapahoes are fresh. They carry the north wind in their limbs."

Roving Rifle said nothing but grated his teeth, and sent a mad glance backward over his shoulder.

No doubt of the pursuit now remained.

The steeds were carrying the boy scout and Noreta well enough; but the Indians seemed to be gaining for all that.

Suddenly Roving Rifle seized the maid's bridle, and stopped his own horse with a word.

They had just emerged from a narrow pass between two hills whose sides were covered with snow as far up as the eye could see.

"Go on; keep straight ahead," he said to the girl whose eyes instantly filled with astonishment.

"What will Roving Rifle do?"

"Go back and check them."

"He cannot do that."

"With this rifle I can do anything," was the proud response. "They shall not catch you, girl. A fate worse than death would follow your capture, for they know you have united your fortunes with mine. Go on!"

Noreta would have remonstrated, but Roving Rifle's look showed that he was not to be moved.

Accustomed always to obey, the Indian maid said, "I will go," and was soon riding on alone, watched by Custer's little scout whose expression told how deeply he was concerned for her safety.

Having seen her out of sight, he turned his horse's head toward the pass they had just left, re-entered it with his repeating-rifle ready for the dread emergency near at hand.

"If I don't reach Custer, Noreta will," he murmured. "I would be the veriest coward on earth if I was not willing to die for the girl who nursed me through a brain fever on the banks of the Canadian."

He drew rein still in the pass, and sat erect in the Indian saddle ready for the foe.

The trail was barely wide enough to admit two horses abreast.

It sloped gently toward the entrance of the pass which Roving Rifle faced, so that he had the advantage of firing downward at the redskins.

Like a mounted sentry, the scout looked over the snow ahead, waiting, not without a certain eagerness, for the living targets which he knew were rapidly nearing the spot.

"There are black specks on the snow yonder, Pawnee," he said, at length, addressing his horse, and raising his rifle almost to his shoulder. "Now, old fellow, stand firm with me, as of yore, and we will teach those red-skins a lesson they will never forget."

The giant shadow of one of the hills fell across the trail where Black Pawnee stood in the snow; but beyond the pass the brilliant starlight revealed every foot of the trail.

Larger and larger grew the objects which the boy's keen eyes had seen; he knew them well. All at once the foremost Indians, two abreast, dashed like the head of a charging cavalry troop, into the pass.

There seemed fifty more behind.

"Now," said Roving Rifle, "I'll soon open the ball, my red serpents! Some of you will not see Yellow Hair when he comes."

The last word was hardly spoken when the repeating-rifle began to pour its deadly contents into the red column but a few yards away.

Worked by hands that knew their duty, and directed by flashing eyes, the rifle emptied more than one blanket saddle, and piled horses and riders in confusion in the narrow way.

"We're fighting for Custer now, Pawnee!" cried Roving Rifle, as he shot. "When those red-skins catch us, there'll be an eclipse, ha, ha! Why don't you come on, my daisies? It's only Pawnee and me; but we're a host!"

Yes, a host, and a match for all the red-skins yelling and dying at the mouth of the pass!

Betraying no excitement, Roving Rifle continued to pour the contents of his Winchester into the writhing enemy until the sixteenth bullet had been sent forward.

"That's the first lesson! If they hanker after a second, we'll see them later, Pawnee," and with a real Indian whoop of victory, the little scout wheeled and rode away.

Not until then did the thunderstruck Indians seem to recover.

Several arrows whizzed past Roving Rifle's head, and one struck the horse, causing him to bound forward faster than ever.

Fortunately, none of the iron-tipped shafts hit the target at which they were fired, and three minutes after his last shot, the boy scout was far from the pass.

He listened, but heard no sounds of pursuit, and believing that he had effectually checked the Indians' advance, he slackened his gait and gave Black Pawnee a needed breathing-spell.

The pursuit had been stopped by Roving Rifle's deadly shots.

There was more than one dead Arapahoe in the pass, and at least three Cheyenne lodges would never welcome their savage lords again.

Some hours later, how many it is not for us to say here, the appearance of the little scout was greeted with loud cheers by the van of Custer's army.

He found that both One Belt and Noreta had reached the goal in safety, and Custer when he shook hands with Roving Rifle said proudly:

"Back in good time and with good news, boy! Within three days we'll meet and whip Black Kettle out of his moccasins!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SAVING THE ARMY.

"ONE Belt's report pained me deeply," Custer continued addressing his boy scout. "He told me that you had been discovered in Black Kettle's camp and were surrounded by several hundred yelling warriors. I gave you up for lost. I could not help doing so, but when Noreta came in saying that you had escaped, I began to feel better."

"The 'Rapahoes knew that there's many a slip, general," smiled Roving Rifle. "I would like to know how many I piled together at the mouth of the narrow pass. More than suited them, I know."

"But will they not follow you and discover our advance?" asked Custer anxiously.

"Bless you no, general. They will go back. I know the 'Rapahoe pretty well, I think. Give him a good dressing and he'll keep away from you for a good long time."

Custer looked pleased, as indeed he was.

As the little army moved on, his fears left him one by one until he felt certain of victory.

The command was in excellent spirits, and after crossing the Canadian river silence was enjoined throughout the whole army.

Custer had left Camp Supply in the face of a blinding snow-storm, but with the regimental band playing "The girl I left behind me," and had marched boldly into the hostile country to strike the red lions in their lairs.

Scarcely had the large wagon-train been parked on the snow-covered plain south of the Canadian, ere Roving Rifle galloped up and reported that the trail of a war-party one hundred and fifty strong had just been discovered.

Custer looked startled for a moment.

"It's all right, general!" exclaimed the boy scout with a laugh. "It is the trail of the last party out going home disgusted with the weather. We can find the Indians now without the least difficulty."

"Yes, but we will follow the war-party."

Orders were issued for an immediate advance.

Roving Rifle galloped ahead again to rejoin California Joe and the Osage scouts, with whom was One Belt, who had enlisted in the service of Custer.

The war-trail was soon struck by the whole command.

It was so plain that it could be followed after

dark, and the army, instead of halting at sunset, pushed vigorously forward.

Custer was now in the valley of the Wichita, and consequently close to the village in which Roving Rifle had the thrilling adventures already related.

The greatest caution was deemed necessary.

The army itself moved four abreast, with the scouts about four hundred yards in advance of the head of the column.

Not a word was to be spoken above a whisper, not a pipe lighted, and in this silent manner the brave little force moved upon the foe.

What if the villages had Indian pickets out?

What if the warriors had discovered that the serpent in blue was crawling upon them across the wind-swept snow?

Then the expedition would fail; then the people of the States would hear of another Indian massacre.

It was not far from midnight when the hand of One Belt touched Roving Rifle's arm, squeezing it gently.

"Something comin'—wolf, mebbe," whispered the Indian boy.

The two youths were some distance in advance of California Joe and the Osages, and not a great ways from the main village of the foe.

What could come from toward the town but an Indian?

One Belt's ears had heard a noise which Roving Rifle had not noticed.

"Let us meet it," the white boy quickly replied, and the twain glided forward again with every sense on the alert.

"Look yonder, One Belt! By my life, you were right—something is coming this way!"

The two boys, crouched at the foot of a clump of bushes that grew beside the trail, saw an object moving toward them over the snow, but whether man or beast they could not determine.

One Belt drew his knife as he gazed; Roving Rifle followed his example.

"A warrior!" suddenly whispered the Indian youth.

"Two of them!" was Roving Rifle's response.

The scene of two Indian warriors moving toward Custer's army was startling enough.

We need not say that the boy scouts realized the danger.

The braves had to be disposed of without the sound of a shot, for such a noise would put the whole tribe on the alert, and defeat the object of the expedition.

The creeping Indians came toward Roving Rifle and his companion over the war-trail which the army had been following since sunset.

"We must kill them," said Roving Rifle.

"Yes, or the Great Father at Washington will lose his Yellow-haired Chief."

"Are you ready?"

"One Belt is always ready."

"Take the one in front. I will attend to the other. Don't fail, my brother."

"When did One Belt fail?"

"I do not know."

The warriors were now so near that the boy

scouts could make out by their dress the tribe to which they belonged. They were Cheyennes.

Roving Rifle, who was to give the signal, waited a minute longer.

"Now! for Yellow Hair—strike!" he suddenly whispered.

The boys leaped from their ambush with the impetuosity of young leopards.

Roving Rifle landed squarely on the shoulders of his selected foe, who started up with a half-suppressed ejaculation of horror.

The young scout was carried up with him, but before the Cheyenne brave could defend himself, he received the knife clutched in Roving Rifle's right hand, and staggered back.

"Help! help! brother!" cried One Belt at that moment in the Kiowa tongue, and Roving Rifle turned in time to see his comrade in a critical situation.

The Cheyenne attacked by One Belt was quicker than the little scout's antagonist, for he had leaped upon his feet ere he was touched, and One Belt was struggling in his grasp.

Roving Rifle of course leaped to One Belt's assistance.

He saw at a glance that the red-boy had seized the Cheyenne's knife-arm in a manner that prevented him from using the weapon, but the issue of the combat was not doubtful.

The Cheyenne saw Roving Rifle approach, and by a desperate effort wrenched his arm loose and raised the knife on One Belt.

In another moment the naked arm would have driven the blade to the hilt in One Belt's breast had not Roving Rifle reached the Cheyenne when he did.

Throwing up his arm, thinking only of saving One Belt's life, not of losing his own, the little white scout broke the force of the stroke, although it sent him staggering through the snow.

One Belt, released by the diversion, fell at the Cheyenne's feet, but ere the brave could attack him, Roving Rifle, who had recovered, sprung at him again.

The Cheyenne gladly stood his ground, and struck at the little scout the same moment that Roving Rifle aimed a blow at him.

"Hol! it is Roving Rifle!" grated the Cheyenne. "He comes back to the Wichita villages alone to die!"

"Alone? No! not alone!" was the response. "Yellow Hair is at my back, Tontaga! He is here with all his braves, but you shall not warn the red eagles of the allied tribes."

The Indian threw himself upon Roving Rifle as the last word was spoken.

With a cry of vengeance he leaped clear over One Belt's body, only to meet a boy firmly braced, armed with a glittering knife.

"That is right! Come!" cried the white youth. "Come to Roving Rifle's blade, Tontaga!"

They met in the trampled snow; two blows followed one another in quick succession, and then the combatants fell apart just as One Belt leaped up.

The warrior reeled away like a person desperately wounded, but did not fall.

"The braves shall be ready to meet Yellow

Hair when he comes!" he suddenly exclaimed, and to Roving Rifle's surprise, instead of renewing the fight, he turned and fled like a deer.

One Belt darted after him without a second's hesitation; then Roving Rifle took up the chase.

Custer would be ruined if the brave reached the village alive.

It was an exciting race over the snow.

Like a deer-hound One Belt bore down upon the quarry, but Roving Rifle exerting all his powers, outstripped him, and closed on the Cheyenne.

They were nearing the Indian village; a whoop or a death-cry might prove fatal to the army.

All at once the Cheyenne turned upon his pursuers.

Roving Rifle was so close upon him, and going at such a speed, that he could not stop.

The collision took place the next moment, and grappling like wrestlers the twain went to the snow together!

Both lost their knives in the fall, and were now provided only with the arms Nature had given them.

Rendered desperate by his own situation, and that of his tribe, Tontaga exerted all his powers.

He found Roving Rifle's throat almost as soon as the ground was reached, and his red fingers seemed to meet there.

The little scout gasped and struggled, but to no purpose.

"Help! hel—," the word died in his throat.

At that moment something fell upon him.

There was a blow and a groan.

One Belt had come up!

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW A BORDER ARMY ADVANCES.

IF Roving Rifle had risked his life in engaging the two Cheyennes, the result justified the means; he had saved Custer's army.

The news was quickly carried back to the general himself, by whom it was received with joy.

"Sheridan did not mistake the value of that boy when he first met him!" exclaimed Custer. "His services shall send him to West Point at the end of this campaign."

The tussle with the two Indians rendered caution more than ever necessary.

Roving Rifle asked and was granted permission to lead the extreme advance. Of course he took One Belt with him, for the two boys, having been brought up together, were inseparables.

A short distance beyond the place where the two Cheyennes had been disposed of it was discovered that there was a fire ahead of the army.

The scout said that this fire was the work of the war-party the army had been following since dark.

Roving Rifle and One Belt agreed to crawl forward and find out the truth, and departed on their mission.

The boys advanced with much cunning, expecting to make some startling discovery.

Their knives were ready to be drawn at a second's warning, for they had received orders not to use their firearms on any account, but to

fight with knives alone if they could not get out of danger by a retreat.

The cautious crawl lasted many minutes, but it brought the young scouts to the vicinity of the fire which turned out to be a few live coals, with here and there a faint blaze.

After reconnoitering the light for a minute they advanced again, and soon reached what they at once knew was a deserted Indian camp.

There were numerous pony-tracks in the snow, and an examination convinced the boys that a herd of ponies had lately grazed there, and that the camp was not that of the war-party.

All the scouts now came up, with them Custer who wanted to observe for himself, and the little band began to creep from hill to hill.

Still leading the advance, Roving Rifle would hurry forward to the crest of each hill, and look ahead before the rest came up.

The advance of an army at night in a hostile country must be a guarded one.

Every yard of ground must be carefully inspected before being occupied, and the scouts must not let anything escape their eyes.

Especially must this be the manner of conducting an Indian campaign.

Custer was always expecting surprises, because he knew the foe with whom he had to deal.

Therefore, he did not start when Roving Rifle came back from the crest of the last hill and reported that he had discovered a large number of ponies in the valley beyond.

"We heard dog bark, too," added One Belt.

Guided by his little scout, Custer went forward to the crest of the hill and looked and listened.

"Can they not be buffalo?" asked the general, after studying for awhile the moving objects in the valley.

"No buffler down there—ponies," said Roving Rifle.

Just then the tinkling of a bell came up from below.

Custer smiled and glanced at the boy scouts.

Fast upon the melody of the bell, which was attached, as all knew, to the neck of the led pony, came a sound from below which dissipated the last lingering doubt.

It was the wailing cry of an Indian baby.

"You're convinced now, general?" said Roving Rifle, looking up into Custer's face.

"Certainly, my boy. That cry gives the whole thing away. We are near the village."

It was true.

The little army of blue-coats had reached the goal at last, and the big battle with the hostiles was near at hand!

"Stay here!" said Custer to the boys. "I will go back and make the final preparations." And Roving Rifle and his companion saw the general creep away and lose himself to their vision at the foot of the hill.

General Custer met the main body of scouts and gave them the situation in a few words.

Then he sent a messenger back to the cavalry to command complete silence, and call his officers to his side.

Soon they came up and formed a silent circle around their commander.

After a few words in whispers Custer led them to the crest of the hill where Roving Rifle was, and pointed out to them everything visible below.

"My plan is this," said Yellow Hair. "Between now and daylight we will completely surround the village. I will divide the command into four detachments. Major Elliott will move with his men to the rear of the village, moving, of course, from our left; Colonel Thompson, marching from our right, will form a junction with him; Colonel Myers will occupy the valley about a mile to my right, while I will move, with the fourth detachment, from this point and open the attack."

In a few moments the clear head of Custer had thought out these plans for the complete overthrow of the red-skins.

His officers listened attentively, grouped about him under the stars, and not a syllable of his whispered words escaped their ears.

"How many Indians do you think are down there, general?" asked Colonel Myers.

"How many, boy?" said Custer, turning to the little scout.

"About fifteen hundred, all told," was the reply.

"Though there be five thousand we must whip them at daybreak, gentlemen," said Custer, smiling at his officers. "We will go back to the troops now. It is four hours till daylight, and the men need rest."

A moment later the hill was deserted, and the little band of officers and scouts moved back through the cold wind that nearly froze the marrow in their bones.

It was a bitter cold night, and Custer had given orders that no fires should be kindled.

The men were compelled to lie in the snow to sleep, or to lean against their horses and catch a little slumber in that position.

They had to hold to their bridles, no difference how they rested themselves, for an alarm was liable to be sounded at any moment.

If any of my young readers yearn for a soldier's life on the plains, let this story of Custer's winter campaign dissipate all such yearnings.

Whether at the post or on the march, the life of the regular soldier is one not to be sought after.

Custer's troops had been tried before; they had fought the hostiles under other leaders, but that bitter November night when they slept fitfully in snow knee-deep within hail of the great war-tribes on the Wichita, was the acme of all their hardships.

It will never pass from the minds of the survivors.

Waiting anxiously for dawn, Custer glided from group to group and conversed with each in whispers.

More than once he consulted his watch in the moonlight.

One by one the hours slipped away.

At length the moon disappeared, leaving the silent little camp wrapped in dense darkness; but this, too, followed the moon by and by.

Custer slipped around and roused his officers; the scouts were already awake.

"Haven't you slept any?" asked the general, coming suddenly upon Roving Rifle.

"Slept? No, sir. I have been on the watch."

"Have you any news?"

"Not any. Everything is quiet over the hill."

"Thank fortune!"

The officers got their men ready without noise.

The horses seemed to understand what was to be done, for not a single whinny disturbed the stillness.

Every officer took the position assigned him by his general, and waited for the signal.

The first streaks of dawn were appearing in the east, and minutes seemed hours to the soldiers.

Custer had moved over the crest of the hill, and was ready to attack.

Behind him stood the regimental band, with their lips at the brass mouth-pieces.

"When Roving Rifle comes back, we'll open the ball," said the general.

All at once the little scout appeared at Custer's side.

"They're all in position," he said.

Custer turned upon the band.

"Now give us 'Garryowen!'" he exclaimed.

The next moment the lively notes of the old fighting air rung out over hill and valley.

It was the battle signal!

CHAPTER XV.

ROVING RIFLE'S ADVENTURES IN THE BATTLE.

CUSTER's little army had the red-skin village completely surrounded when the attack commenced.

For once, the Indians were caught napping, and, startled by the music of the band and the wild notes of the bugles, they seemed dazed for a few moments.

The cavalry charged into the village with exciting shouts, led by their commanders, and the battle from the first raged with great fury.

In almost less time than we can pen a page, the Indian town was in possession of the troops.

The surprise and brilliant dash had won it before the Indians could recover; but the battle was by no means ended.

From trees, rocks, and the river-bank a deadly fire was poured in upon the soldiers, and more than once the little detachments were forced to recoil from the rain of arrows and bullets.

Roving Rifle had entered the village with the detachment headed by Custer in person.

He was thrilled by the thought that he had returned to the allied tribes at the head of the blue-coated army of the frontier.

Where was Black Kettle?

He was eager to meet the Cheyenne.

And where were the Arapahoes who, under Raw Robe's leadership, wanted to avenge Big Bison's death?

He was dashing hither and thither, fighting with the troops, when a bullet rung past his ears.

He turned to see a young warrior reloading his rifle on the river-bank.

A single glance betrayed the Indian's identi-

ty, and with a whoop of defiance, Roving Rifle galloped toward him.

He swooped down upon the red-skin before the rifle could be recharged, and drew rein at his side."

"Roving Rifle kill Raw Robe an' then shoot 'Raphoes between the hills," flashed the brave.

"That's just what I've done!" was the quick reply. "Drop your gun and we'll fight on an equality."

The Arapahoe threw his rifle in the snow, and Roving Rifle did the same.

Out flew the young warrior's knife.

"It's to be knives, is it?"

"Knives, white boy."

The spot occupied by the young enemies was, for the battle-field, a secluded one, and a better one for a duel at that time could not have been chosen.

The river cold and swift flowed at the Arapahoe's back.

The snow reached to the water's edge, and in many places it wore red stains where the dying braves had bled.

Roving Rifle's opponent was a warrior who proudly wore his first feathers.

"Me avenge Raw Robe!" he cried. "Come on, Rifle!"

Looking the Arapahoe fairly in the eye, Custer's little scout advanced his foot a little nearer, and drew back his knife.

Crack! crack! crack! sounded rifles and carbines on every side, but the young duelists paid no attention whatever to the sounds.

Suddenly the Arapahoe sprung at Roving Rifle with a blow deftly aimed at his breast; but the boy scout warded it off, sending the red skin back almost to the water's edge.

"When you avenge Raw Robe, drop me a line!" cried Roving Rifle derisively as he followed up his good fortune.

A yell of rage burst from the Indian's throat, and utterly regardless of life he leaped again at his foe.

This time he beat down the arm thrown up to oppose him, and succeeded in depriving Roving Rifle of his knife by a cut across the wrist.

The Arapahoe now counted victory certain, but all at once the boy scout grappled with him and he found himself in for a tussle he had not bargained for.

The young combatants were almost equally matched, and they writhed to and fro on the river-bank like two young boars.

Now the Indian would be almost down, and now he would succeed in recovering, and force Roving Rifle to the water's edge.

It was a struggle for revenge that surpassed any the little scout had ever been engaged in, and he knew that unless it terminated soon they would attract the attentions of some Indians who would end it in a manner not to his liking.

Roving Rifle put forth all his strength, and having forced his foe to the edge of the bank for the fourth time, he resolved to hurl him into the water.

His left hand was already at the Arapahoe's throat, but the Indian's was also at his windpipe, in which he seemed to feel the cutting impress of the tapering red fingers.

Roving Rifle braced himself against a convenient rock, and by a desperate effort loosened the vise-like hand at his throat, then, before the young red-skin could recover, threw him toward the water.

A cry of despair shot from the Arapahoe's throat as he went backward, but all at once his hand caught in Roving Rifle's long hair.

The next instant the little scout found himself being dragged after the Indian, and before he could release himself he was in the river!

It was a cold plunge and a cold bath, for the first blasts of winter had imparted their iciness to the water, beneath which the two combatants sunk immediately.

Roving Rifle did not lose his presence of mind, but he could not repress the thrill that shot to his heart when two arms entwined him under the flood.

The horror of his situation nerved him to instant action.

Weapons he had none; the knives of both parties lay on the river-bank among the trampled snow, and they had to continue under the waves the battle with the arms nature had given them.

Roving Rifle seized the red limbs that encircled his body and strove to tear them apart.

He failed, but he did not despair.

Giving up the arms he seized the Arapahoe's throat; his fingers seemed to sink through skin and flesh as he tightened on the trachea; his thrilling situation lent him strength which he had never possessed before.

Tighter and tighter grew Roving Rifle's grip.

At last the arms about his body relaxed; he bore the Arapahoe downward toward the bottom of the river, nor released him until he himself was free.

All this fierce struggle under the water occupied less time than it has taken our pen to describe it.

Roving Rifle lost no time in rising to the top of the water.

He came up nearly out of breath and with no disposition to renew the struggle.

His horse stood where he had been left, waiting for his master, who, he seemed to know, must rise from the river victorious.

He greeted Roving Rifle with a whinny of delight, and as the little scout crawled up the bank he threw a look down the river.

All at once he saw a dark object rise to the surface of the water and a pair of red hands were thrown toward heaven, then the apparition disappeared, and the river rolled on as before.

It was all over with the young Arapahoe!

Custer's little scout lost no time in regaining his arms.

As he picked up his rifle, the magazine of which was filled, several wild yells on his right startled him and he whirled upon the enemy.

He saw at once that he had been discovered by a small body of Indians who had seen him emerge victorious from the water, and who knew that he was Roving Rifle, Custer's scout.

The boy had not a minute, scarcely a second, in which to prepare to receive the new enemy; he was drenched and cold, and his limbs ached.

But with eyes kindled by the sight that faced

him, he sprang to Black Pawnee's side and throwing the rifle over the steed's back, ordered the red-skins to keep off.

Menaced by the little scout's attitude, they halted a few yards away, and then precipitated themselves behind some bowlders that lay near.

"The first head that shows itself will get bored!" said Roving Rifle to himself, eying the Indians' position.

He did not have to wait more than a minute.

There were two rocks that lay side by side with the width of a child's hand between.

The scout's quick eye saw the muzzle of a rifle glide between the rocks, and just beyond, the glittering eyes of a Kiowa.

The next moment he fired at the target thus exposed, and there leaped into full view as the rifle cracked the stalwart form of a warrior.

"One!" ejaculated Roving Rifle. "Now let the others—"

His sentence was broken by the springing up of all the other red-skins, and a second later they leaped over the rocks.

Uttering a shout of defiance Roving Rifle sprang from behind his horse, and met the charging band with full confidence in his sixteen-shooter.

He did not seem to move the weapon a hair's breadth while he shot, but the red-skins went down before it until the band seemed on the eve of annihilation.

With six lying dead, or struggling for life on the snow, the rest halted, and without having fired a single shot at the youthful marvel in marksmanship, ran back to the bowlders.

"Now, Pawnee, we'll get out of this," said Roving Rifle.

He was on his steed's back the next moment, and to the Indians' surprise and rage, disappeared before they could lift a hand to bring him down.

He drew rein before Custer who had fought like a lion since the opening of the battle.

"Isn't it terrible?" exclaimed the young general. "These red-skins fight like lions. We have lost Hamilton and Bornitz and some of our best privates. But we've got the twist on them now, boy. Black Kettle will not relish another winter campaign."

Since daylight the Indian had carried on the fight with a fierceness never known before in border warfare.

The whites had taken a good many prisoners and eight hundred Indians ponies, besides completely destroying the town.

Several times in the afternoon the savages made efforts to recover the lost ground, but the blue-coats repulsed them at every point, and at last they gave up the contest, and retired to the secure places among the adjoining hills.

While Roving Rifle was going on foot through the village, a wounded Indian darted from beneath some bark, and seized him before he suspected the presence of danger.

"Lean Bear has found his son again!" hissed the Kiowa. "He will not help Yellow Hair any more."

Roving Rifle recoiled from the hatchet raised to dash his brains out, for fear himself from the Indian's hands he could not.

All at once the crack of a rifle sounded throughout the village, and the descending hatchet, striking the little scout's cap, glanced aside.

Lean Bear had been struck down in the act of depriving Custer of his little scout, but by whom?

Of course Roving Rifle turned to thank his rescuer.

A few yards away stood Noreta, the Indian girl, rifle in hand.

Her eyes told him all.

CHAPTER XVI.

ROVING RIFLE'S LAST SHOT.

OUR story of Custer's winter campaign would not be complete without an account of how the victors got out of the country of the hostiles, and back to the almost sacred precincts of Camp Supply.

General Custer knew that, while the Indians had been severely chastised, they were by no means properly punished—not enough, at any rate, to prevent them from again engaging his army.

The hills around the valley swarmed with hostiles; there were other villages near the one destroyed, and these facts rendered the situation of the little army somewhat critical.

Black Kettle still survived to muster new regiments of red warriors whose blood was hot, and who burned for revenge.

The wagon-train, which had been left to follow the army, was approaching, and Custer feared that the hosties would attempt to cut it off.

Therefore, he resolved to retreat toward the train, and, having joined it, push back to Camp Supply.

"What are you going to do with the eight hundred ponies, general?" ventured Roving Rifle coming upon Custer, who was surveying the captured herd.

"I hardly know. What would you do with them, boy?"

"Since you don't want to leave 'em here for the hostiles, and since they'd make us march slow, I'd shoot 'em all."

The advice seemed to accord with Custer's thoughts.

It looked cruel to shoot so many inoffensive animals, yet they could neither be left to the Indians, nor driven away with the army.

Custer decided to follow his little scout's advice, and he presently called all the captured squaws together, and told them of his resolve.

He bade each one select her favorite pony from the herd, and having seen the selections made, he gave the necessary command for the wholesale destruction of the rest.

The red-skins from the hills looked down upon the shooting of the eight hundred ponies, and swore undying hatred for Yellow Hair, the great white soldier.

Slowly the day wore away, and toward evening Custer prepared to march back.

Placing his prisoners in the center of the column, he marched toward the Indians as if he intended to renew the attack, but suddenly wheeling about, he moved rapidly toward the approaching wagon-train.

Night came, but the little army kept on.

The scouts surrounded it and watched carefully for the foe which was expected to follow, anxious to get in some death-shots.

Not until Custer's watch denoted the hour of two in the cold morning, did the army prepare to bivouac.

Huge fires flashed up against the sky for secrecy was needed no longer, and the soldiers gathered around the blaze and enjoyed the best meal they had tasted for many an hour.

While they had suffered the loss of a number of gallant leaders and good comrades, besides all their thick overcoats, they had inflicted severe loss on the enemy.

Custer's winter campaign had demonstrated the fact that the regular soldier, when led by a competent general, could fight in the snow as well as among the summer grass-blades, and henceforward the Indian would not consider himself safe in his winter-quarters.

"Do you want to see the man in the moon general?" asked Roving Rifle, with a smile as he appeared suddenly to Custer who had just issued orders for the night encampment.

"The man in the moon?" echoed Custer.

"What are you driving at, boy?"

"Come and see," was the answer, and without hesitation Custer followed his little scout from his bivouac fire.

With a strange smile at his lips, Roving Rifle led the commander of the army from the camp, passed the picket-line, and did not halt until they reached the foot of a snowy hill whose crest was more than two hundred feet above them.

"The man in the moon, general. Look up. He's been there ever since dark."

Roving Rifle's arm directed Custer's gaze toward the top of the lofty eminence, and his eyes watched the general's face while he looked.

"By Jove! the old fellow, sure enough!" burst from Custer's throat. "But I never knew before that the man in the moon was an Indian."

"He couldn't be anybody else in this country, general," laughed Roving Rifle. "That fellow up there can be dislodged from his position."

"How?"

"With this." And the boy scout held out his rifle.

At the moment that Custer looked up the great silver disk of the moon was rising above the hill, and outlined against it were the head and shoulders of an Indian.

The feathered head-dress was plainly visible, and the figure was giant-like in all its proportions.

"You can not bring down the man in the moon, boy," said Custer, in reply to Roving Rifle's boast.

"May I try?"

"Certainly."

Roving Rifle cocked his gun and stepped back with a proudly-confident glance at the white soldier.

Custer saw the rifle touch Roving Rifle's shoulder, and the barrel was elevated until it seemed to cover the elevated target, which remained like a statue in the spot where it had first been seen.

"Watch him tumble, general," suddenly said the boy, and the next moment the silence was broken by the sharp crack of the trusty weapon.

An exclamation of admiration followed the shot; for Custer had seen the man in the moon leap up until his head seemed to strike the highest rim, and then shoot down and out of sight.

The silver disk was now entirely unobscured, and hung in the heavens in all its bewitching beauty.

"Good! good!" said Custer, patting Roving Rifle on the shoulder. "I did not know I had a rifle in my command that could kill the man in the moon."

"Wait until I have proved the shot."

"Are you going up the hill?"

"Why not?"

"The Indian may not have been alone."

"I'll risk that, general. An Indian spy never has any company, you know."

Custer said no more, and Roving Rifle was soon moving up the hill.

Twenty minutes later he reappeared suddenly to the soldier, and held out two hands in which lay several feathers, a necklace of brass beads, and a bunch of most beautiful arrows.

"Who do you think the man in the moon was?" he asked.

"Some Cheyenne brave?"

"More than a brave, general. We used to call him *Wishatawa*; your soldiers know him as *Black Kettle*."

Custer started and uttered an exclamation.

"Do you mean to say that you have killed the great leader of the *Hostiles*?" he cried.

"Well, he's up there at any rate, and he will never lead again the red-skins on any more border forays."

"That settles it," said Custer. "How would you like to go to West Point?"

"Is there where they make soldiers?"

"Yes."

Roving Rifle shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"I'd rather carry my rifle wherever I pleased on the plains," he said. "You see I don't know who I am. How would Colonel Roving Rifle sound? It might do out here, general; but they'd never take well to it in the States."

"I'll see to that," was the quick reply. "I'll give you my name if you'll take it."

"Yours, general?"

"Why not? Roving Rifle Custer doesn't sound bad if I do say it myself."

"Hang me, if the handle isn't improved by the addition!" exclaimed Roving Rifle. "I'll take your name, general, but fifty campaigns will not make me what you are—the whitest soldier, and the best gentleman in blue I ever saw!"

"Here! here! No flattery, my young man, or you'll never see the Point!" laughed the soldier, leading the way back to camp.

California Joe would not believe what had taken place until he saw for himself and was convinced.

Black Kettle lay dead on the crest of the hill, to which he had followed the little army in advance of his band, hoping to find it in a position open to an attack.

The chief's death threw a damper over the pursuit, for it was at once abandoned; and the next day the army struck the wagon-train.

Without further incident, the entire command reached Camp Supply, where General Sheridan awaited it, and the campaign ended in a grand review by Little Phil.

As Roving Rifle rode past the lieutenant-general on Black Pawnee, Sheridan's eye kindled, and he saluted the little scout in true military style.

"That's young Custer, general," said Custer himself to Sheridan. "I've given him my name, which I hope he will never dishonor."

"He never will! I'll vouch for him!" laughed the lieutenant-general.

Roving Rifle entered West Point immediately, and four years later when he graduated with honors, the first person to congratulate him was Custer, the second a modest and beautiful girl, whom he called Noreta.

Lieutenant Roving Rifle Custer was ordered to the Wild Western frontier for duty, and there we may meet him again, not as a mere scout, but as a soldier of the Government, and an honor to the name he bears.

One Belt, his Indian brother, waited for him among the hills of the West, and Noreta went along, not to inhabit a birchen lodge, but to dwell in a frontier post as Lieutenant Custer's dusky bride.

I shall, in conclusion, say that Custer's winter campaign proved a lesson which the hostiles of the Southwest remembered for many a day.

THE END.

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